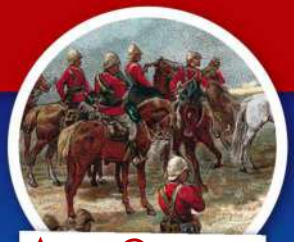
EXPLORE YOUR **DEVONSHIRE** FAMILY ROOTS

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 216 APRIL 2024 £5.75

# WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®



ARMY OFFICERS FAMILY RECORDS

# PARISH REGISTERS ONLINE

Uncover 500 years of family history with our region-by-region guide

## SURNAMES SOLVED

Explore the origins and history of your family name

## I uncovered my Italian roots using social media and DNA tests

## IRISH NEWSPAPERS

Track down amazing stories to boost your research

## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

How Victorians cracked down on a growing problem

**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE**

- Create a stylish family history chart
- How agricultural prizes can reveal rural kin
- British Home Children records go online

# DISCOVER THE WHOLE PICTURE

When you explore your family tree, you find names, dates and places. But it's the extra details that truly reveal your family story.

Ancestry has a huge range of historical records, and with an average of two million added every day, there's always more to discover. So even when you think you know your family, they can keep surprising you.

**Do you have a fascinating family story to share?**

We'd love to hear about your discoveries, email us at *yourstory@ancestry.co.uk*

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# Welcome

## Sarah's Top Tip

**Play around with spellings to make better use of newspaper searches**

Anyone who has searched online collections of historic newspapers will know that optical character recognition (OCR) can be hit or miss. OCR enables us to search millions of pages from newspapers with the click of a mouse – but, if you notice particular letters are being misread in the title you are searching, then adapt your spellings to match. For example in our 'Focus On' on **page 29** Nicola Morris suggests typing 'ff' instead of 'ss' when searching early newspapers.

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When we launched *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* in 2007, I remember talking to someone prominent in the world of family history who said that we would never reach a point where all parish registers in the UK were digitised, because there were just too many of them. Now, although we are still a long way from seeing every register digitised, it certainly doesn't look like an impossible task. On **page 14** we explain what has been digitised and put online, and where you need to search to find your family in the records. Parish register collections are scattered across numerous websites, so we have put this guide together to help you locate the baptisms, marriages and burials that mark a life lived.

We also have a touch of inspiration for anyone researching their rural ancestors with our guide to agricultural prizes on **page 20** (do write in if you find any winners in your family), and if they lived in Devon, 'Around Britain' on **page 61** will help you trace them.

I love it when new records go online. If you had an ancestor who was a British Army officer, then a recent record release may help you learn more about their family (see **page 38**) and the new collection of British Home Children records on **page 10** also looks fascinating. No matter who your family were, we're here to help you find them!

Sarah

**Sarah Williams** Editor
*sarah.williams@ourmedia.co.uk*

## Contributors

### Jonathan Scott
Every month Jonathan writes our 'Around Britain' and 'Best Websites' articles, but this month he also tours the web to find online parish registers. Read more on **page 14**.

### Nicola Morris
Nicola is a consultant genealogist and lecturer in Ireland, and has researched for the *Who Do You Think You Are?* TV series. On **page 29** she shares her Irish newspaper search tips.

### Dr Angela Buckley
On **page 54** crime historian and author Dr Angela Buckley shares her insights on crime and punishment in the Victorian era. Find out more about Angela at **drangelabuckley.com**.

COVER IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES/THE MARRIAGE OF ETHEL DOREEN SAWARD AND ERNEST GALLIANO AT ST ETHELDREDA'S CHURCH, HOLBORN, LONDON, 1926

# CONTENTS
APRIL 2024

## FEATURES


**14 Parish Registers** ON THE COVER
Jonathan Scott unveils his updated region-by-region guide to the essential websites that can help you uncover 500 years of family history

**20 Agricultural Prizes** ON THE COVER
Nina Hoole explains what the prizes awarded at agricultural shows can reveal about our ancestors

**54 Crime & Punishment** ON THE COVER
Angela Buckley investigates how the Victorians cracked down on a growing problem


## RESEARCH ADVICE


**29 Focus On** ON THE COVER
Genealogist Nicola Morris shares her expert advice for using Irish newspapers to boost your research

**35 Best Websites** ON THE COVER
Jonathan Scott picks the best online resources to explore the origins and history of your family name, including digital dictionaries and one-name studies

**38 Record Masterclass** ON THE COVER
Phil Tomaselli explains how to research British Army officers' families as a major release arrives on Ancestry

**52 Tech Tips** ON THE COVER
Nick Peers reveals how to create a stylish family history chart using the website Treemily


## YOUR RESEARCH


**24 Reader Story**
*WDYTYA? Magazine* contributor Gail Dixon has traced her Northumbrian farming forebears back to the 1500s

**58 Eureka Moment** ON THE COVER
"I uncovered my Italian roots using social media and DNA tests," says Audra Carapella Crans-Henderson

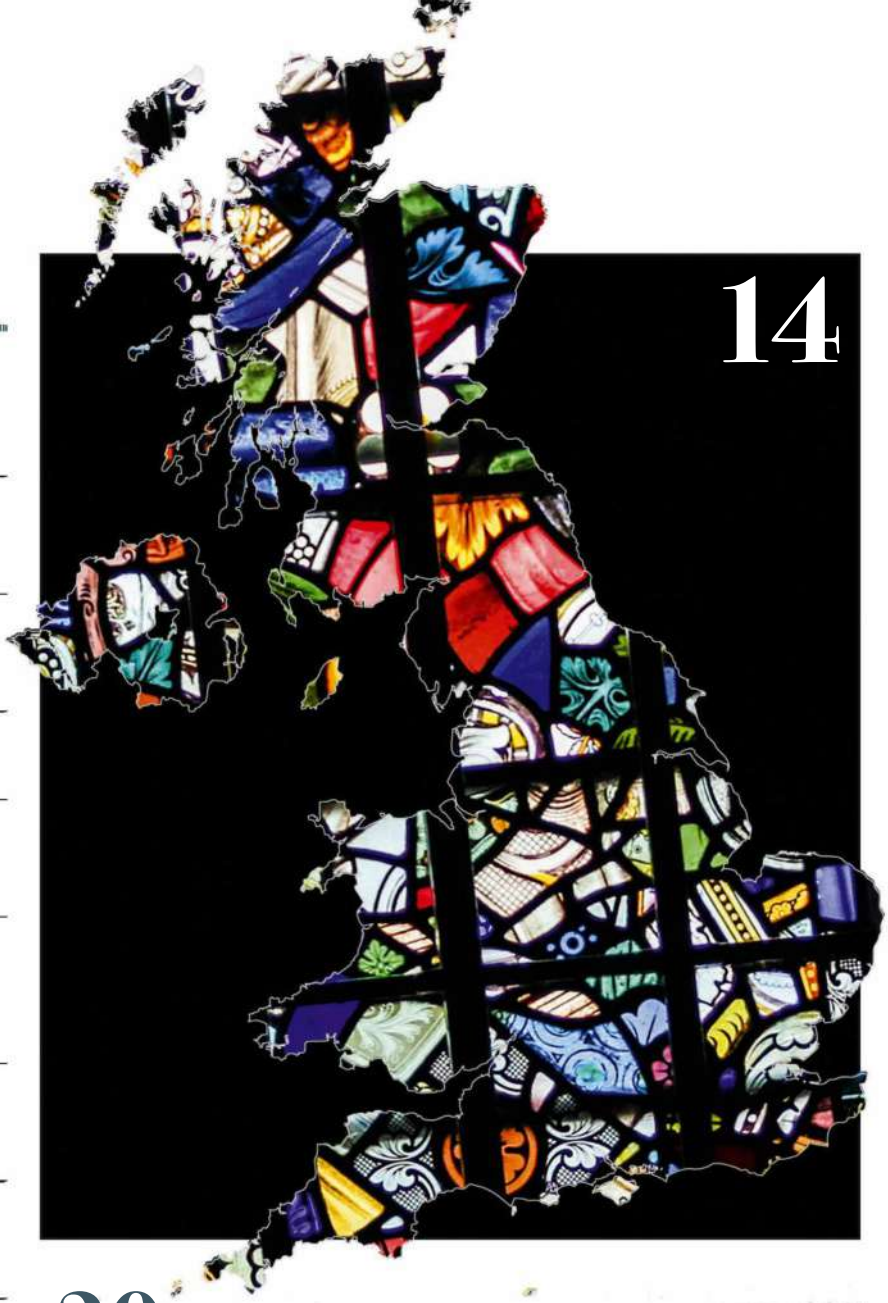
**74 Family Hero**
Martyn Guy's formidable great aunt rode a mule across some of Asia's most dangerous terrain in 1925


## REGULARS


**6 Letters**
Your ideas, comments and advice

**9 What's On**
Online and in-person talks, shows and exhibitions

**10 News** ON THE COVER
All of the latest developments, including the release of a crucial British Home Children collection on Findmypast

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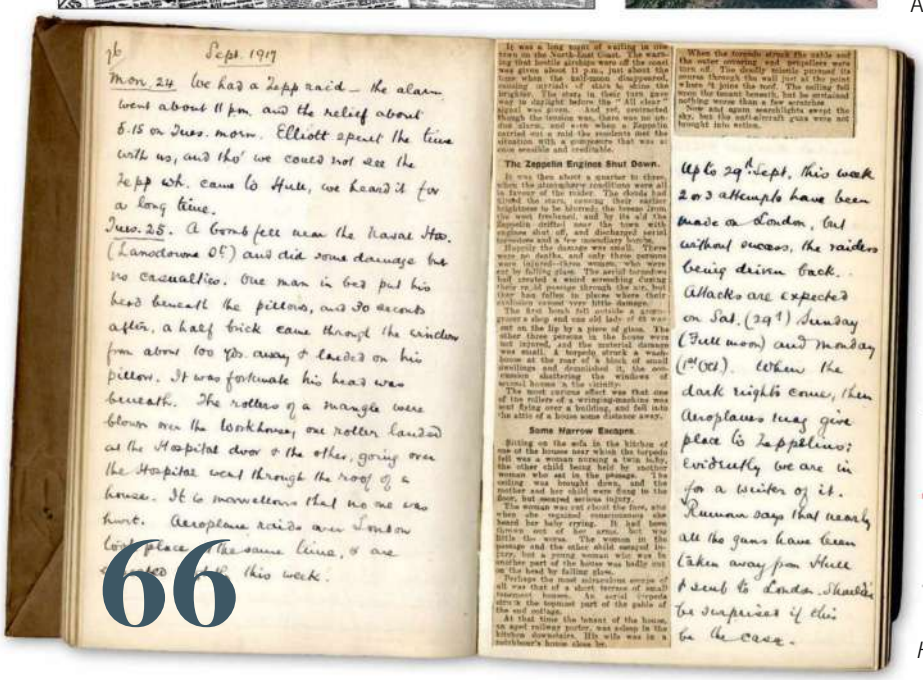


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**13** Off The Record
Alan Crosby contemplates how our ancestors slept

**43** Q&A
This month's brick walls include tracing a seducer in a 'criminal conversation' case, identifying an illegitimate great grandfather's father and researching a great great uncle who fought in the Second Boer War

**49** *Wdytya? Magazine* Shop
Back issues, magazine storage and certificate binders

**50** Local Industry
A worker at the Whitefriars Glassworks, City of London, shapes a hot glass vessel in the early 20th century

**60** Your Projects
Rosemary Collins reveals how online volunteers are powering the Crowd Cymru transcription project

**61** Around Britain ON THE COVER
Jonathan Scott explains how the collections held in archives in Exeter, Plymouth and Barnstaple can help you research your Devonshire forebears

**66** Gem From The Archive
A Hull chaplain's diary, 1915–1920

## GUIDE

**68** Books & Digital Picks
This month's family history inspiration

**70** TV & Radio
*Hidden Treasures of the National Trust* returns

# Letters

**Email** *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

**Write to** *WDYTYA? Magazine*, Eagle House, Bristol BS1 4ST

**WIN** an AncestryDNA test kit from **ancestry.co.uk** **WORTH £79**

The writer of our star letter wins an AncestryDNA test **worth £79** – so drop us a line and share your thoughts with us.

Lindsay reminds us that we should supplement photos of our relations with audio recordings

STAR LETTER

## Recording The Present… To Explore The Past… For The Future

I started recording members of my family in the hope of picking up family information and for prosperity. I was inspired to do this when I heard the voice of Florence Nightingale recorded when she was an elderly lady. I bought a cheap, easy-to-use voice recorder for this purpose, but smartphones can do the same thing.

I gathered together many questions from online ideas that I could ask to help me to get the person being interviewed talking. "Tell me about your school", "What was your childhood house like?", "Tell me what your father was like", "What was your wedding day like for you?", "Do you remember the moon landings?" etc. The results were eye-opening! I discovered some unspoken family secrets, new lines of research and details that would have taken lots of research to uncover.

The people were at first a bit hesitant but once they got started, it appeared that they had lots to say and they found it good to talk. Sometimes sad memories, sometimes happy memories, and sometimes they surprised themselves by remembering long-unspoken memories.

Afterwards, when I got home, I downloaded the recordings and then I transcribed them. This gave me the opportunity to really listen to what was said, and to take notes at my leisure.

The great thing was letting the person talk at their own pace. Many times they went from subject to subject, and they began to remember things they hadn't thought about for years. I just let them talk. Primary schools, secondary schools, church, weddings, children, fathers, mothers, grandparents and siblings.

The information was invaluable. There is a massive bonus to all this. Imagine being able to hear your great great grandmother talking about what life was like for her as a child in the Victorian times… yes, it would be amazing. Now, in 30, 40, 100 years' time my descendants will be able to listen to that.

I lost my wife very recently, and I'm so glad that I had recorded her talking about her childhood etc. My granddaughter, who is 13 at present, will be able to listen to that when she's 63… and let her own children and grandchildren hear it.

I would urge everyone do this.

**Lindsay Swan, Motherwell**

Editor Replies **Thank you for sharing your experience of audio recordings Lindsay. I keep meaning to do this with my own parents, but your letter has really inspired me and I'm sure it will inspire others.**

## WW2 Still In Living Memory For Some

I was intrigued by the comment Alan Crosby made in the final paragraph of his 'Off the Record' column in the February issue that nobody in his family remembers the Second World War. In my 82nd year I certainly do, at least some small part of it!

I vividly remember being whipped out of bed and taken into an air-raid shelter on two separate occasions in Portsmouth, Hampshire. One occasion was at my mother's sister's house in Randolph Road, which had a shelter in the back garden. I also vaguely remember that I had a gas mask in the shape of Mickey Mouse.

The other occasion was at 46 Northern Parade, my paternal grandparents' house opposite Alexandra Park. On this occasion my mother carried me along the back-garden path and down into a cellar/bunker. I was crying at having my sleep disturbed, so to placate me, my mother said, "You know Mr and Mrs Hunt", the couple living next door and who shared the shelter with us. Yes, I remember all that vividly!

I was born on 2 June 1942, so these air raids would have been when Hitler was sending the V1 and V2 rockets over. Although it was a month short of my third birthday, I also remember the street party we had in Gladys Avenue, a street that was at right angles to Northern Parade, when we celebrated the end of the war.

Just before war was declared, my father had celebrated his 19th birthday. He was a machinist in an engineering factory in Goldsmith Avenue, Fratton. The factory naturally was turned over to munitions production, but, due to Portsmouth being a major naval city and susceptible to bombing, the factory was transferred to Frome in Somerset,

GETTY IMAGES

and I was born in that county. After the Battle of Britain, the factory returned to Pompey, so that is where I grew up. But as my father's was a reserved occupation, he was never called up to fight, though he did join the Home Guard and was on anti-aircraft duty in the park.

I had no trouble finding my grandparents and Dad's younger brother in the 1939 Register, but I have never been able to find Dad! Did his parents deliberately conceal his existence for fear of losing him in the war, even though my grandfather had served for 30 years in the Indian Army, and Dad had actually enlisted there at the age of 15? Fortunately, they all came home to England when Grandad retired. **Terry Stephens, Edgbaston, Birmingham**

EDITOR REPLIES **Thank you for sharing your wartime memories Terry. I suspect you will have triggered memories in some of our other readers too.**

## A Flower Among Thorns

I've been researching my family history for a few months. Sadly I've not discovered any links back to royalty but mostly labourers, both agricultural and urban. Among the others there are some soldiers, policemen, a couple of deportations for horse stealing, confinement to a prison hulk and numerous visits to the workhouse! A rough old lot really!

Then I happened upon Fred Flower, who I vaguely remember when a child as "Uncle Fred in London". He was my late mother's cousin, and lived next door to her when she was young.

Powerful force for expansion and development in further education

# Fred Flower

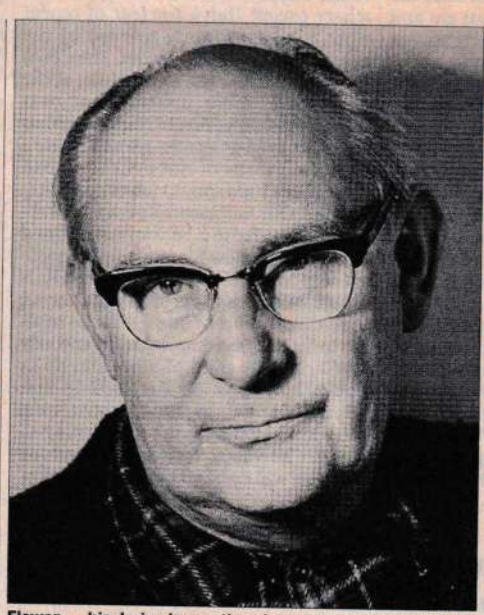
Fred Flower, who has died aged 86, was principal of Kingsway day college in central London from 1960 to 1978 and one of the great humanist educators of his day. Kingsway became one of the country's most diverse and thriving further education colleges, and his skill in providing a framework for the development of unconventional ideas powerfully influenced British post-16 education.

Flower sought ways of making learning interesting to people who needed a second chance. He assembled the resources — and took the risks — that opened up further education to new groups of students: academically able young people who needed intensive personal support, young people with learning difficulties, "at risk" youngsters from local schools. He encouraged new syllabuses and forms of assessment at O- and A-level. Many of the innovations, daring at the time, entered the mainstream of educational practice.

Students were at the centre of the enterprise. All full-time students had a personal tutor; the students' union was given a place on the academic board and the governing body; black students formed their own society; youth workers were employed to encourage intruders to the college to join courses.

It was an invigorating environment. Teachers trusted Flower with ideas, because he nurtured them and gave them back. In argument he strikingly combined combat and vulnerability. He relished the debates in the weekly staff bulletin, in which he would set out his case for organisational changes in the college — never afraid to call down Gramsci or John Stuart Mill on his side. He was an unusual principal, and a lovable man.

Born in London's Grays Inn Road area, he was educated at Kilburn grammar school, and gained a classics scholarship to King's College London, where he won the divinity prize and was active in the officer training unit.



Flower . . . his daring innovations became standard practice

He trained as a teacher, and in 1938 joined a preparatory school in Bexhill. As a result of the Spanish civil war, he turned to leftwing politics and disconcerted the school authorities by attending communist meetings while acting as scoutmaster of the school troop.

In October 1939, he volunteered for army service, marrying his wife, Lorna, shortly afterwards. He soon asked to join the Army Education Corps, and so began a lifelong interest in post-school education. Travelling with the Eighth Army in north Africa and Italy, he organised educational and recreational events for troops. It was brought home to him how wide were the interests and talents of many who had not been successful within the formal educational system.

Flower left the army as a lieutenant colonel, and with an MBE. From 1946 he was responsible for training at the Treasury, and in 1948 he became Hendon technical college's head of adult education. There he developed a liberal arts programme, including performing arts groups and an English programme for overseas students.

Then, in 1960, came Kingsway. Flower was skilful in gaining the Inner London education authority's trust in support of new developments. He had left the Communist party after the Soviet Union's suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, and became an influential voice in Labour education debates. In 1971, Labour unexpectedly gained control in Harrow and, as a co-opted alderman, Flower led the education committee's drive to establish comprehensive education. He revealed his skills as a practical politician, choosing the strategy (tertiary colleges), and the arguments to support it, with great care. The changes evoked fierce opposition, but in meetings he was reasoned and calm — the supreme debater, never happier than when arguing a case he thought was right.

On the national scene, he was an eloquent advocate of the findings of two committees of which he was a member — those which produced the Newsom report (1963) on the education of 13- to 16-year-olds and the Taylor report (1977) on the government of schools. His book Language in Education (1966) explored new ideas in communications and linguistics in an accessible way, making connections between disciplines and with practical classroom experience. After the war, he had taken an economics degree by correspondence from Wolsey Hall, and he retained an interest in distance learning, writing an early Open University text. He was involved in a number of pioneering projects exploring the educational and training needs of young industrial workers.

Following his retirement from Kingsway in 1978, Flower was awarded the CBE. He continued to write and undertake research, exploring the social and personal origins of his own family and returning to his interest in classical culture. He remained a deeply committed humanist: as he put it, "All there is, is us, and what we make of our lives."

He is survived by his wife and three sons.

**Dick Booth**

*Frederick Dalby Flower, educationist, born June 6 1915; died July 4 2001*

**In Memoriam**

**HOWARD, David,** died on 13th August 1995. You will always remain deep in our hearts. All our love from Mum and Dad. To place your announcement telephone 020 7713 4069 or fax 020 7713 4128 between 9:30am and 3pm Mon-Fri.

Sally was delighted to discover this fascinating obituary for her late mother's cousin, Fred Flower

infancy) who were Braintree silk weavers, many of whom relocated to the East End of London. In fact, he sent Mum his research on

**Clare Abbott commented on a reader's story about his Napoleonic Wars ancestor: tinyurl.com/wdytya-napo**
Napoleon captured and incarcerated merchant sailors as well as members of the armed forces. My great great great grandfather was among the crew from a coaler near Poole in 1806 and only released in 1814.

His grandma was Maria, one of the huge Owers family of 18 children (plus two who died in

the Owers/Everards, which has helped me no end.

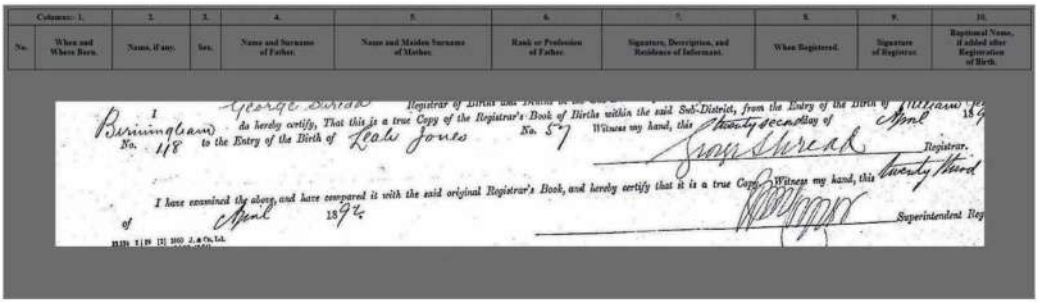
I found the attached obituary among items given to me by Dad before he died. It seems that Fred had the family brains (and one of his sons was a professor of earth and environmental sciences in Chicago!). So, until I unearth someone even more noteworthy, I give you Fred Flower: teacher, soldier, former communist, educationalist.

**Sally Sallett, by email**

EDITOR REPLIES **Hi Sally. It sounds like you have achieved a lot in the few months you've been looking into your family history. Newspaper obituaries can be such a great find. Uncle Fred sounds like a gem.**

## Wills Worries

Recent letters have highlighted the difficulties experienced by some researchers when using the online ordering service for wills proved in England and Wales post-1858. I'd like to mention an alternative. The website **www.gov.uk/search-will-probate** provides the option of downloading, printing and completing Form



Jude ordered a digital birth certificate for Hannah Fermalon, but received a different document for a different person

PA1S to send with payment to the Probate Registry's postal address – this service is much appreciated by researchers who do not have a credit card.

This search service also costs £1.50 and "includes a copy of the probate record and will (if there is one)", and it can take between four and six weeks to receive the copy through the post.

However, it's best to firstly check on a commercial website or on the Government's website as to whether or not probate/administration was granted.

I feel that the worrying digitisation proposals highlighted in *WDYTYA? Magazine* ('News', February) raise the question of whether or not this postal search service will continue. The Government's website states that the proposals relate to wills and "other documents" and the intention is "to digitise and then allow the destruction of original wills after 25 years".

As researchers know, not all older documents are in good enough condition to be digitised, and this is irrespective of whether they relate to famous figures or to our own 'ordinary' ancestors. In the event that the worrying proposals go ahead, I wonder whether all documents found too fragile to be digitised will be preserved and researchers given the option, on request, of receiving instead a transcript on payment of an appropriate fee?

Finally for comparison purposes, we never hear, I think, of national and local archives destroying any of the original documents they hold once they have been digitised and made available on their own or commercial websites. Indeed, I believe they continue to be stored and, as the documents no longer need to be regularly handled, this in turn helps in their ongoing preservation.
**Barbara Green, by email**

**@jools61 responded to our tweet asking if any followers had uncovered criminals in their tree**
My grand uncle was charged with murder in 1938. He was acquitted of killing his wife, but it was still very suspicious circumstances and I doubt that he was innocent.

Editor Replies **A lot of people are worried about the potential destruction of the physical copies of wills. When I last looked almost 15,000 people had signed the online petition not to destroy them: petition.parliament.uk/petitions/654081. It wouldn't surprise me if the postal ordering service is also part of the consultation.**

## More Wonky Scans

Following on from Prof Carolyn Roberts' letter in the March issue, I am also a victim of wonky scans on the General Register Office's new digital service. I recently had to get a refund on a birth certificate, because the scan had cut off the crucial date of birth.

However, on Sunday I ordered a digital copy of a birth certificate for Hannah Fermalon who was born in 1892 in Birmingham, which I was able to find and select from the index on the GRO's website. The digital image that I received back has no connection at all to anyone with the name Fermalon, and rather than being a copy of a birth register entry, it is a portion of a declaration pertaining to a birth entry for Leah Jones.

I have asked the GRO for a refund, and to investigate if the correct document has been misfiled/indexed, before I order the PDF version and find out it is just a better copy of the same wrong document.

When it works, the digital option is great for narrowing down a search for family members, when there are many with the same name, year of birth etc, or for keeping within a budget. It is certainly better than having to fork out for lots of PDF or physical copies, only to find out they are the wrong people. So I am glad of the digital service, but I really do wish it had more quality checks.
**Jude Bumby, by email**

Editor Replies **Hi Jude. That is a very strange image to receive. I have chased my contact at the GRO to see if we can get a response for you.**

**YOUR LETTER IN PRINT** We reserve the right to edit any letters sent to the magazine. Messages posted to our Facebook wall and tweets sent to us may also appear in print. The choice of Star Letter is the editor's and the prize is subject to change.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# What's On

**Email** *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk* to feature your event here for free

## PICK OF THE MONTH

The FHF Really Useful Show returns in person

### FHF Really Useful Family History Show

**20 April**

a **Burgess Hall, St Ives, Cambridgeshire**
t 01263 824951
w **fhf-reallyuseful.com/2024-live**

Nick Barratt will be one of the speakers in St Ives

The Family History Federation, which represents family history societies in England and Wales, has been holding its popular Really Useful Shows for years. They've been virtual-only since the Covid-19 pandemic started but this year the organisation is holding two in-person events to celebrate its 50th anniversary, the first of which is in East Anglia. The talks are 'Bread, Gruel and Suet Dumplings – Workhouse Life' by Ian Waller, 'The Future of Family History' by Nick Barratt and 'Tithe Enclosure Maps and Records for Genealogists' by Gill Blanchard. As usual, there will also be free help and research advice from family history societies, family history books on sale and more. Free entry, talks £2 each.

## IN PERSON

### Billingsgate Market At The Heritage Gallery

**Until 16 May**

a **Guildhall Art Gallery, London**
t 020 7332 3700
w **tinyurl.com/guild-billings**

This exhibition tells the story of the famous market in London. Free, booking recommended.

### Westerham And The Foundling Hospital

**27–29 March**

a **Quebec House, Westerham**
t 01959 567430
w **tinyurl.com/nationaltrust-westerham**

This daily talk will explore the lives of the 469 children who attended the Westerham Branch Foundling Hospital (1760–1769). Free with entry to Quebec House (£7).

### Lady Codebreakers Of Bletchley Park

**6 April**

a **Dartford Science and Technology College**
t 01322 527604
w **tinyurl.com/nwkfhs-code**

Ian Thomson, a former guide at Bletchley Park, shares the many achievements of the women there in the Second World War. Free to North West Kent Family History Society members, non-members asked to make a small donation.

### Captain William Green, Georgian Military Engineer

**10 April**

a **Central United Reformed Church, Hove**
e *secretary@sfhg.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/sfhg-ev-bri**

This Sussex Family History Group event with John Kay focuses on an 18th-century officer who managed coastal defences. Free.

### Education In Thatcham: A Thirst For Knowledge!

**10 April**

a **West Berkshire Museum, Newbury**
e *newbury@berksfhs.org.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/berkfsfhs-educ**

This talk from Sue Ellis is free to members of Berkshire Family History Society; non-members are asked to make a £5 donation.

### The Darker Side Of Wiltshire: And Tips For Newspaper Article Research

**11 April**

a **Wilton Community Centre**
t 07533 267546
w **tinyurl.com/wilts-fhs-salisbury**

Claire Dimond-Mills shares her advice at this Wiltshire Family History Society event. Free.

### An Imaginary Walk Through 17th Century Dorchester

**16 April**

a **St George's Church, Poole**
t 01202 785623
w **tinyurl.com/dorsetfhs-walk**

Brian Bates speaks at this Dorset Family History Society event. £3.

### Register Of Qualified Genealogists Conference

**20 April**

a **Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds**
e *admin@qualifiedgenealogists.org*
w **qualifiedgenealogists.org/2024-Conference**

This year's RQG conference has the theme 'Sharing Memories: Uncovering Your Family History Through Storytelling'. £70, or £60 for members. Book by 13 April.

## ONLINE

### 'A Terrible Beauty'

**28 March**

w **tinyurl.com/sog-terrible**

David Ryan explains how to research Irish revolutionary ancestors in this talk from the Society of Genealogists. £10.

### Guild Of One-Name Studies

**30 March and 10 April**

w **one-name.org/events**

The guild has two upcoming webinars – 'The Internet Archive: A Genealogist's Dream Collection' with Taneya Koonce (30 March) and 'An Introduction to Irish Family History Research' with Natalie Bodle (10 April). Free, advance registration essential.

### MI9: Escape And Evasion In The Second World War

**3 April**

w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-mi9**

Author Helen Fry will discuss the organisation that engineered the escape of Allied forces from behind enemy lines in this event from The National Archives. Pay what you can, £5 recommended.

### Researching The West Country Poor

**19 April**

w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-west**

Esther Hoyle shares her tips for using the archives of the South West Heritage Trust to trace your poor ancestors. £5.

## BOOK AHEAD

Learn how to write your family history with this online course

### Uncovering The Generations

**9–23 May**

w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-uncover-generations**

Book coach and author Ellie Stevenson introduces you to researching and writing or recording your family story, including the resources available. Three two-hour workshops over three weeks. £149 (£99 with early-bird discount until 31 March).

# News

**Rosemary Collins** and **Sarah Williams** report on data releases and genealogy news

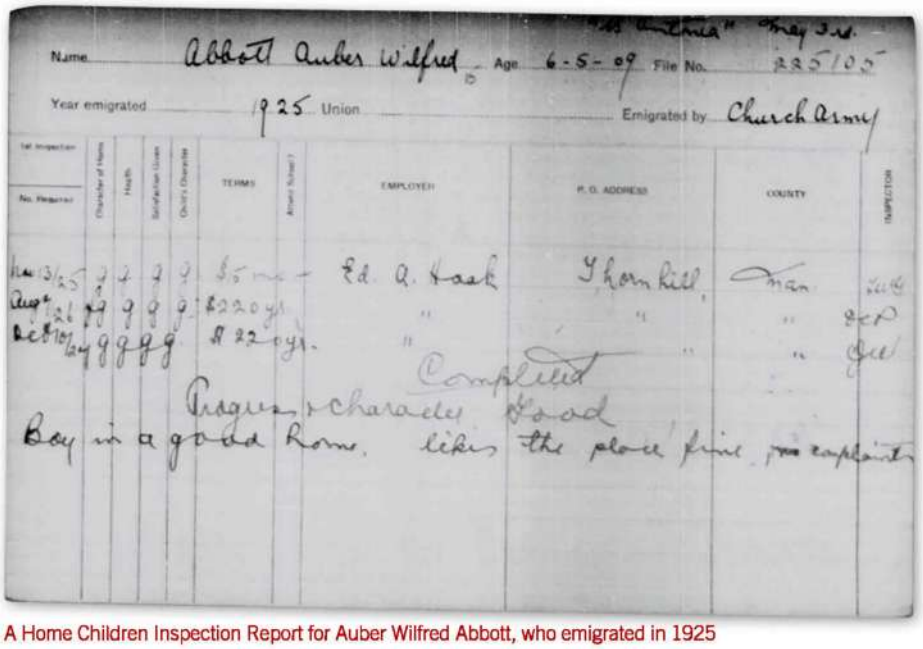
# Findmypast adds free British Home Children collection

**Family history website Findmypast (findmypast.co.uk) has announced a new collection of nearly 39,000 records of the 'Home Children' who were sent from Britain to Canada.**

Between 1869 and 1948 roughly 100,000 children were sent from Britain to Canada by charitable organisations. About 12 per cent were orphans, while others had living parents but came from children's homes, workhouses or impoverished families. Some found loving homes, but many were victims of abuse or exploitation. An estimated four million Canadians today are descended from former Home Children.

Findmypast has launched the new collection, available at **findmypast.co.uk/page/british-home-children**, in partnership with organisations including The National Archives at Kew, the British Library, Library and Archives Canada and the charity Home Children Canada.

So far it consists of four collections – 'Canada, Home Children Inspection Reports', recording inspections of children's foster homes in Canada between 1913 and 1932 (25,534 records); 'Canada, Home Children Board of Guardian Records', containing details of children in the workhouse system in England who were then sent to Canada (10,649 records);


Name Abbott Auber Wilfred Age 6-5-09 File No. 225105
Year emigrated 1925 Union Emigrated by Church Army

A Home Children Inspection Report for Auber Wilfred Abbott, who emigrated in 1925

'Lancashire, Liverpool, Children Sent to Canada 1883–1925', featuring registers of children sent from Liverpool to Canada (466 records); and 'Britain, Children's Legislation Correspondence', which consists of government correspondence around the passing of the 1908 Children Act (2,062 records).

The first three collections have been indexed by name, and all four include digitised images of the original records. They are free to access, although users need to register with the site. More collections will be added in the future.

Sarah Bush, Findmypast's managing director, said, "We're extremely proud to launch this groundbreaking new collection, which will allow millions more people to uncover the stories of their forced migrant ancestors. It's an incredibly poignant and complex part of our Commonwealth history."

# Historic newspaper website launched

**Family history website MyHeritage (myheritage.com) has launched a new site for digitised historic newspapers, OldNews.com (oldnews.com).**

The website is similar to existing newspaper collections such as the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**), also available to 'Pro' subscribers to Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), and Newspapers.com (**newspapers.com**), run by Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**).

You can search the newspapers on OldNews.com for free

MyHeritage said that OldNews will have "a huge repository of hundreds of millions of historical newspaper pages from around the world".

At the time of writing the only UK newspaper on the site appears to be the *London Gazette*, which is already available for free at **thegazette.co.uk**.

Gilad Japhet, founder and CEO of MyHeritage, said that the firm plans "to make OldNews.com the number one online repository of international historical newspapers beyond the English-speaking world".

Annual UK subscriptions cost £95 with a 24 per cent discount in the first year. MyHeritage subscribers at the new 'Omni' level can access the site for free.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

Baptisms recorded in the Petersfield, Liphook and Haslemere circuit in 1887

### Ancestry adds Methodist records from Hampshire

Family history website Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has added the collection 'Hampshire, England, Nonconformist Registers, 1835–1921', containing 58,487 records of baptisms, marriages and burials. They took place in 11 Methodist circuits: Aldershot, Farnborough and Camberley; Andover; Basingstoke; Christchurch and Lymington; Eastleigh; Farnham and Alton; Gosport and Fareham; Newbury; Petersfield, Liphook and Haslemere; Romsey; and Winchester.

The project will shed new light on slavery

### FamilySearch teams up with American Ancestors

The genealogical organisation FamilySearch International (**familysearch.org**) has announced a collaboration with US genealogy site American Ancestors (**americanancestors.org**) on the 10 Million Names project (**10millionnames.org**). The project seeks to recover the names of the 10 million people of African descent who were enslaved in America, starting with people in historical records and tracing their family lines forward.

GETTY IMAGES / PAULINE HUGHES

Evacuees learn how to handle milk churns at a farm in Hambleden, Buckinghamshire, 1941

# Records of 300,000 Second World War farms to go online

**The National Archives at Kew (TNA; nationalarchives.gov.uk) has announced a project to digitise the 1941 National Farm Survey, thanks to a grant from the Lund Trust (lundtrust.org.uk) worth £2.13 million.**

The survey contains details of more than 300,000 farms in England and Wales including how the land was used, its location, its condition and its management, as well as details of owners and tenants.

The first records to be digitised will be the individual farm records (MAF 32), with the accompanying survey maps (MAF 73) coming later.

Jeff James, TNA's chief executive officer and keeper, said, "This is a unique opportunity to realise the potential of what was seen as a 'Second Domesday Book', a 'permanent and comprehensive record of the conditions on the farms of England and Wales'. Thanks to this partnership, the National Farm Survey, an enormous database of land ownership and land usage in mid-20th century Britain, will be freely available online to researchers in the UK and globally."

The project is scheduled to be completed by March 2027.

Rotherwas women's football team from the First World War

## CAN YOU HELP?

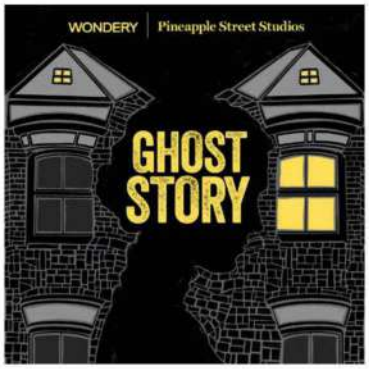
The Exploring Rotherwas – Then and Now project (**rotherwas.com/projects**) is appealing for stories of former employees of the Rotherwas munitions factory in Herefordshire. The factory opened in 1916, and made munitions during the First World War. It was also in operation throughout the Second World War. It employed about 6,000 staff, predominantly women, in the First World War and roughly 8,000 in the Second. Members of the public are invited to send in the details of relatives who worked at the factory and their roles and experiences, as well as any Rotherwas artefacts or photographs they may have. You can contact the project on *rotherwas@hotmail.com*.

# Family history podcast appeals for stories

**The makers of the hit family history podcast *Ghost Story* (wondery.com/shows/ghost-story) are appealing for family stories.**

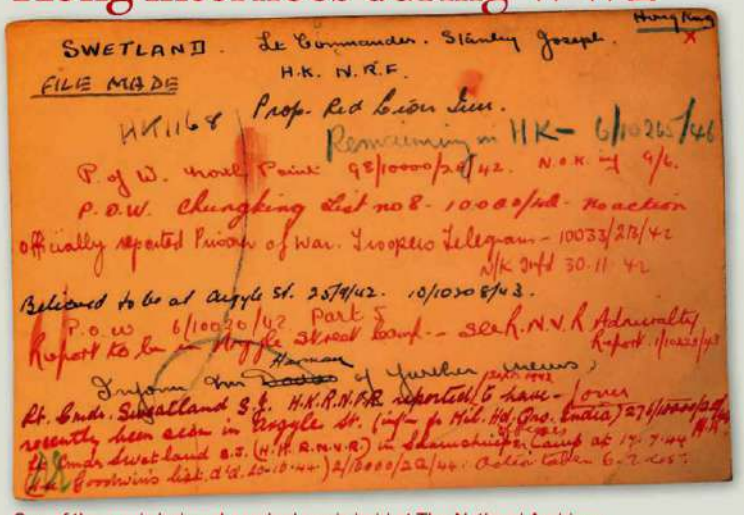
The first season of *Ghost Story* was presented by journalist Tristan Redman. He discovered that residents of the house he lived in as a teenager in Richmond, South-West London, had reported seeing the ghost of a faceless woman. By astonishing coincidence, Dr Naomi Dancy, Tristan's wife's great grandmother, was murdered in the house next door in 1937. The podcast follows Tristan as he sets out to uncover what happened.

A statement on Wondery's website reads, "If you have a really great ghost story or a wild family drama, reach out to us at *ghoststory@wondery.com* or call us at 1-347-460-9473 to share more details. Please include your best contact info, so we can follow-up if we're interested in learning more. Who knows? Your story could be the basis for *Ghost Story* season 2."




The first season of *Ghost Story* combined family history and the paranormal

## TNA indexes records of Hong Kong internees during WW2



One of the newly indexed nominal cards held at The National Archives

The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**) has added an index of internees in Hong Kong during the Second World War to its online catalogue Discovery. A team of volunteers catalogued nominal cards, held in TNA's series CO 1070, that record details of British civilians and soldiers imprisoned during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. The records can be searched at **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16520**. The transcribed information includes each individual's date of birth; their civilian profession; details of any military service; when they were captured; and where they were held.

## Taylor Swift

Research has revealed that the world-conquering pop star and her boyfriend, American football player Travis Kelce, are 10th cousins once removed (**tinyurl.com/wdytya-swift**)

## 78%

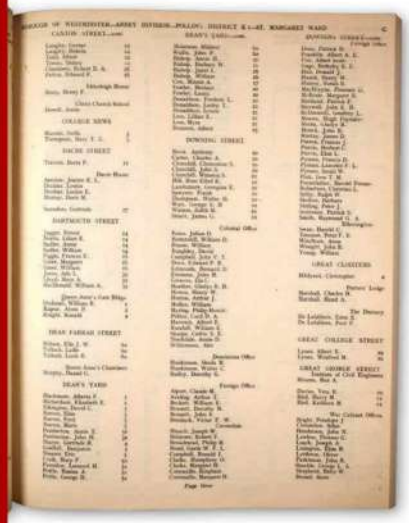
The proportion of UK heritage organisations that are currently experiencing costs or budget pressures, according to a new survey (**tinyurl.com/mus-heritage-surv**)

## 62,569

The number of records that have been added to the collection 'England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770–1935' on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**)

## BRCA

NHS England is offering free testing for faults on the genes BRCA1 and BRCA2, which are associated with a higher risk of some forms of cancer, to anyone in England with at least one Jewish grandparent (**jewishbrca.org**)



Winston Churchill's entry at 10 Downing Street in the 1945 electoral register

# Ancestry adds electoral registers from Westminster

**Family history site Ancestry (ancestry.co.uk) has added a collection of 13,360,481 electoral registers from Westminster in London, dating from 1902–1970.**

Electoral registers record the names and addresses of those eligible to vote, and are an excellent way of seeing where your ancestors lived in years without census records.

The registers are taken from the City of Westminster Archive Centre collections, and include searchable transcripts and images of the documents.

The records allow researchers to see who lived in 10 Downing Street, the home of the British prime minister, over the years. For example, although electoral registers were not compiled during the First and Second World Wars, Winston Churchill can be found there in 1945 and during his second term as prime minister in the 1952, 1953 and 1954 registers.

The records also include other famous people. For example, James Matthew 'JM' Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan, is recorded at Adelphi Terrace House, Robert Street, in 1910–1936.

# Time For Bed

**Alan Crosby** reveals how our ancestors slept

A few days before Christmas last year we stayed for a couple of nights in a 'pub with rooms' owned by a major landed estate in the Midlands. What a bed we had! It was a proper four-poster, complete with a tester: the rectangular panel that forms the ceiling of the bed. Sometimes you come across slightly absurd imitations of the real thing, beds with flimsy upright posts and swathes of net instead of heavy curtains – but this had thick wooden uprights, built to last.

What struck us immediately, though, was the height of the bed and its very deep mattress. The top, the sleeping level, was as high as my chest. There was a little portable set of steps to help with the ascent, but getting into bed felt like mountaineering. And once at the summit, there was the ever-present fear of falling out and tumbling into the abyss.

I've many times come across entries about such beds when working on probate inventories. They are usually called 'standing beds' and might be constructed in situ, so that once built they were unlikely to be moved. Very often, too, inventories list the 'furniture' of the bed – the curtains, valance and tester-cloths. The whole ensemble was prestigious and costly: a beautifully carved and decorated bed was a status symbol and heirloom. There our ancestors might have lain, sinking into the luxurious depths of a soft mattress and buried under an immense featherbed. With the curtains drawn to keep out the draughts, even icy winter nights could be cosy and snug.

**Bedstocks were the flat-pack furniture of 400 years ago**

Of course, most people were not so lucky, and bedstocks are well-nigh ubiquitous in inventories for those lower in status. The word seems designed to confuse any researchers who are new to 16th- and 17th-century handwriting, who may be deeply puzzled as to why bedsocks seem so expensive!

'Stock' meant 'post' or 'beam of wood', so bedstocks were the frames of beds, eight hefty wooden beams – four uprights and four horizontals – that could be slotted and pegged together, or taken apart for easier storage: the flat-pack furniture of 400 years ago. IKEA is nothing new! Because they could be dismantled and reassembled relatively easily, they were ideal for households that fluctuated in size, and we often come across instances where there were several sets in rooms used mostly for storage, ready for any unexpected guests.

Bedstocks did not have a solid base. Instead, rope was threaded between holes in the long horizontal beams in a criss-cross pattern, to make a cradle for a mattress. Proverbially, the ropes would stretch with use, so the bed would sag in the middle until they were tightened again. This is a favourite anecdote of country-house guides, who claim that it's the origin of the phrase 'sleep tight' – although I'm not so sure.

Mattresses might be filled with chaff – chopped straw – which when fresh smelled glorious and was, so I've been assured by elderly people who have slept on them, extremely comfortable. But when the straw became matted and damp and musty, it might easily be infested with small creatures. Bedbugs have recently made an unwelcome reappearance (they never actually went away), but before the 20th century they were all-too-familiar bedfellows.

My grandparents often reminisced about a holiday they took c1920, when with some of their brothers, sisters and cousins they travelled from Manchester into the Cheshire countryside, to a small farm owned by a distant relative. In the interests of propriety, the men slept on chaff mattresses in the barn, while the girls stayed in the farmhouse. The next morning the boys' faces (and presumably other parts of their anatomy) were red, swollen and itching madly. The chaff was alive! Half a century later, there were tears of laughter in Grandma's eyes as she told the tale. Grandad remained silent.

**ALAN CROSBY** lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION WWW.SUEGENT.COM

# PARISH REGISTERS ONLINE

**Jonathan Scott** unveils his updated region-by-region guide to the key websites

Parish register news in recent months has been more about additions, tweaks and new search tools, rather than tent-pole county collections. If you've failed to find someone in the past, it's definitely worth checking back because many counties have been updated since we last surveyed the UK. You might find that material from an elusive parish has arrived, that the date range has expanded, or perhaps there's a newly improved index.

Ancestry launched important new Midland and south-east England collections in 2023, TheGenealogist, which has been concentrating on non-parish sources in recent months, is about to release a major set of data for Worcestershire, and Findmypast continues to add fresh batches through its partnerships with the Family History Federation and the Catholic Heritage Archive.

TheGenealogist has also just revealed that it's been working to georeference its existing parish registers so they can be viewed through its Map Explorer tool, so you will see pinned locations of where ancestors were baptised, married or buried.

The focus here is the established church, but we do also touch on Catholic and nonconformist registers.

GETTY IMAGES

# London And Middlesex

Registers from the capital and the ancient county of Middlesex

It's important to remember that many London boroughs were once part of counties that surround the city. You may well find sources in parish collections for historic Essex or Kent, for example. Indeed in September Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) added a new set of 'Surrey' material that contained images and transcriptions of baptisms from nonconformist chapels in the London borough of Southwark.

Aside from Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), which dominates thanks to its agreement with the London Metropolitan Archives, there are many useful resources. Boyd's London Burials Index and the City of London Burials Index are available to members of the Society of Genealogists (**sogdata.org.uk**) or Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). The latter also has indexed transcriptions for Westminster and elsewhere, produced with the West Middlesex Family History Society (**west-middlesex-fhs.org.uk**).

FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) has parish registers from Middlesex back to 1539 (updated in August last year and now containing two million records), as well as Catholic records for Southwark and Westminster. You can browse images of Westminster City Archives' Middlesex registers with an index courtesy of Findmypast (**familysearch.org/search/collection/2072795**).

The Church of St Mary Newington, Newington Butts, Southwark, London, 1798

### Ancestry £

w **ancestry.co.uk**

The London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) holds parish registers from more than 800 churches within the City of London and the former counties of London and Middlesex. Ancestry's numbers are dizzying. The births and baptisms collection from 1813–1923 contains 23 million entries on its own. The combined 1538–1812 collection has another 18 million. Marriages and banns from 1754–1938 number 14 million. The site also has material in partnership with Westminster Archives. Although the digitisation focus has shifted to other LMA sources, there are still regular updates to the parish collection – for more details see **ancestry.co.uk/search/categories/london_met_archives**.

# The South-East

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex

### Ancestry £

w **ancestry.co.uk**

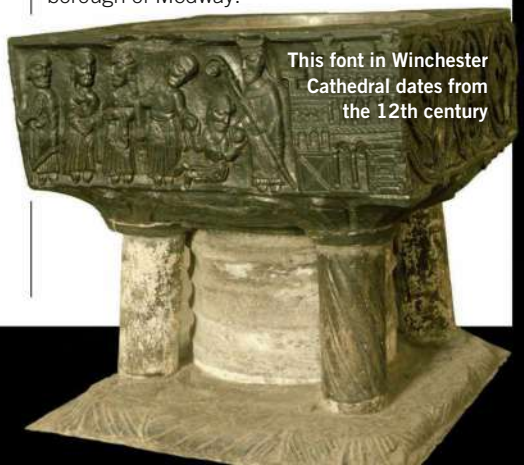
In March 2023 Ancestry added 1,583,654 Hampshire baptism records dating from 1813–1921, via a partnership with Hampshire County Council announced in December 2021. This has been joined by a baptisms, marriages and burials collection from 1536–1812, plus marriages and banns (1754–1921). You'll also find updated collections for East and West Sussex totalling 11 million entries, and about four million transcriptions and images produced in partnership with Oxfordshire Family History Society.

The Joiner Marriage Index (**joinermarriageindex.co.uk**) has data for Buckinghamshire, Kent and Hampshire, and TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) has parish transcriptions for Buckinghamshire, Kent, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey and Sussex.

FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) is a useful resource for Isle of Wight kin, with 23,707 records. Meanwhile there's modest amounts for Berkshire (36,000), a little more for Buckinghamshire (210,000) and Hampshire (279,469), and hefty numbers for Surrey (1.4 million), Sussex (2.2 million) and Kent (3.4 million).

FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) has content covering Oxfordshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Surrey. It has 1.8 million Surrey entries, many from metropolitan parishes, alongside more than one million records from the deaneries of Portsmouth, Gosport, Fareham and Havant, held by the Portsmouth History Centre.

During 2023 Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) added content to its collections for Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire as well as a cache of Kent baptisms, marriages and banns and burials from the Canterbury Cathedral Archives, alongside burial transcriptions from the borough of Medway.



This font in Winchester Cathedral dates from the 12th century

GETTY IMAGES

# The South-West

Bristol, the Channel Islands, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, the Isles of Scilly, Somerset and Wiltshire

Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has more than 14 million entries drawn from Gloucestershire and Bristol archives, another 13 million from Somerset, seven million for Wiltshire, smaller collections from Dorset and Jersey, and almost 10 million from Devon.

FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) highlights include Bishops' Transcripts from Devon and Cornwall. Its 'Cornwall Parish Registers' collection (**familysearch.org/search/collection/1769414**) currently contains 202,325 images and about 840,000 records. The site also has a Gloucestershire nonconformist collection as well as records for Somerset, Bristol and Wiltshire.

Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has excellent coverage for the Plymouth area, and transcription coverage for the rest of the West Country through partnerships with family history groups. TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) too has society transcriptions for the region.

This 1839 painting shows a meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers

### FreeREG Free

w **freereg.org.uk**

FreeREG is good for the West Country, particularly Somerset. Also, try the Online Parish Clerks groups here: Cornwall (**cornwall-opc-database.org**), Dorset (**opcdorset.org**) and Wiltshire (**wiltshire-opc.org.uk/genealogy**).

# Yorkshire And The Humber

Including East Yorkshire, North Yorkshire and West Riding

Ancestry's (**ancestry.co.uk**) deal with West Yorkshire Archive Service means it has a hold over the western side of the region, as well as material for York. The West Yorkshire roster boasts 6.3 million births and baptisms (1813–1910), 4.9 million baptisms, marriages and burials (1512–1812) and 4.1 million marriages and banns (1813–1935). North Yorkshire material includes a combined baptisms, marriages and burials collection with 2.7 million entries, and a combined collection for York with 1.7 million.

For its part Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has partnered with a group of archives in the Yorkshire Digitization Consortium. The site has recently taken its total number of baptisms for the county to 9.2 million. Last summer it also added 243,000 Catholic baptisms from the Leeds diocese (1757–1913), alongside 56,000 marriages and 26,000 burial records.

Finally FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) has data for all three historic ridings – East (172,000) North (690,000) and West (2.6 million).

### FamilySearch Free

w **familysearch.org**

FamilySearch has data produced in partnership with both Ancestry and Findmypast. The enormous collection 'England, Yorkshire, Parish Registers, 1538–2016' (**familysearch.org/search/collection/4439317**), containing 11,478,527 records, draws on material held by the Borthwick Institute for Archives, Doncaster Archives, East Riding Archives, Sheffield City Archives, North Yorkshire Archives and Teesside Archives.

The market square in Boston, Lincolnshire, in Victorian times

# East Midlands

Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland

Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has partnerships with archives in Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire. The Derbyshire collection totals about 6.3 million entries, Northamptonshire 7.6 million. In autumn 2022 nearly 4.4 million parish records from Nottinghamshire were released, and the collection has expanded since then.

FamilySearch's 2.8 million parish registers for Leicestershire (**familysearch.org/search/collection/2840172**) were updated in August last year. Most have images, and indexes provided by Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). Its Derbyshire registers (1537–1918) total 2.9 million entries, with 53,151 images.

Nottinghamshire Family History Society's transcription project has reached one million baptisms and 674,000 burials, alongside an index to 346,000 marriages (**nottsfhs.org/society-projects/parish-registers**). TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) also has transcriptions, while the numbers for FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) are Derbyshire 1.5 million, Leicestershire 280,324, Lincolnshire four million, Rutland 29,000, Northamptonshire 1.4 million and Nottinghamshire 1.4 million.

### Findmypast £

w **findmypast.co.uk**

Findmypast has transcription data from Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire. At the start of 2024 the website added 14,000 Derbyshire nonconformist baptisms, joining 450,000 parish transcriptions in August. An additional batch of Leicestershire baptisms took the county total to more than 1.2 million, alongside 712,00 marriages.

GETTY IMAGES

# The East

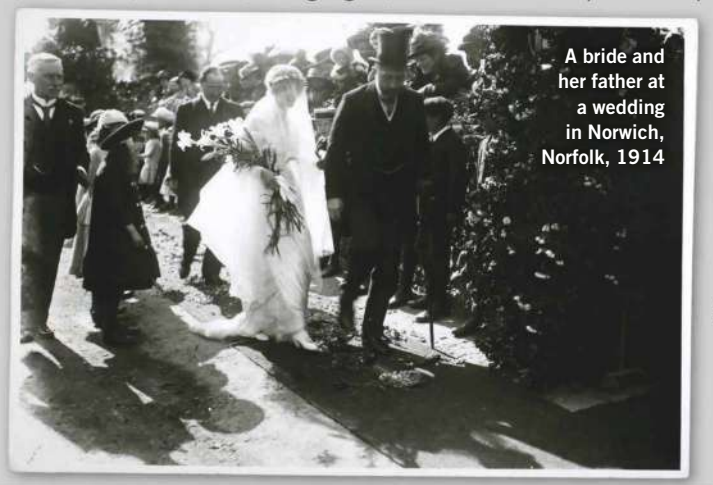
Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk and Suffolk

You're spoilt for choice if you have ancestors from the east of England. Parish images and indexes for Norfolk alone can be found at Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**), while FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) has images. Ancestry's Norfolk holdings includes 2.6 million Bishops' Transcripts (1579–1935). FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) has 6.3 million transcriptions for the county, and Norfolk Family History Society runs a database for members (**norfolkfhs.org.uk**).

In 2023 Ancestry updated its indexes to marriage licence bonds, while Findmypast added 13,795 Norfolk parish records (1923–1998), and 130,000 transcribed records for Bedfordshire.

FamilySearch also has more than one million Bishops' Transcripts (BTs) for Cambridgeshire (**familysearch.org/search/collection/1465708**), as well as a few million registers for Essex. Other east of England collections include Hertfordshire marriage bonds, BTs for Norfolk, a Bedfordshire index and image collection covering 1538–1983, and material for Huntingdonshire. Keep in mind that some images can only be viewed at Family History Centers or affiliate libraries.

Unindexed images of Essex registers from more than 400 parishes can be accessed via Essex Archives Online (**essexarchivesonline.co.uk**), excluding baptism registers less than 16 years old and marriage registers from after 1957. Ancestry has name indexes to most of the images. Finally, FreeREG also has substantial datasets for Essex, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire.



A bride and her father at a wedding in Norwich, Norfolk, 1914

### TheGenealogist £

w **thegenealogist.co.uk**

TheGenealogist's coverage for Norfolk is strong. The site has indexes and images of parish registers from most of the county's 700 ancient parishes, alongside some parish data for Essex, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Hertfordshire.

# North-West

Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside and the Isle of Man

TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) has material for Cheshire, Cumberland and Lancashire, while Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has significant collections for Cheshire and Lancashire.

Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has updated three parish sets for historic Cumberland, adding 65,252 baptisms, 68,211 marriages and 62,746 burials, as well as similarly sized batches for Westmorland. The website's collection of Catholic records covers parts of north-west England, including Salford and Liverpool.

FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) has Lancashire nonconformist records (1647–1996), containing 1.4 million names. It also has Cheshire Bishops' Transcripts (1598–1900), some 46,000 marriage bonds and allegations from the archdeaconry of Richmond (Lancashire), and 1.8 million records for Manchester.

Lastly you can also search transcriptions of parish registers from the Isle of Man free of charge via Manx National Heritage's site at **imuseum.im/search/people**.

### Lancashire OnLine Parish Clerks Free

w **lan-opc.org.uk**

The 'What's New' page on the website of this thriving OPC project has details of all of the recent additions, including references to 15 new or expanded datasets in January 2024 alone.

# North-East

County Durham, Northumberland, Teeside, and Tyne and Wear

Parish registers from the diocese of Newcastle, covering Northumberland and Newcastle, survive at Northumberland Archives. Registers from the diocese of Durham cover the area between the rivers Tyne and Tees, broadly equivalent to the historic County Durham boundary. Durham Record Office's website has a useful guide: **durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/family-history/parish-registers**.

FamilySearch has 280,000 images of registers at Woodhorn Museum in Ashington and Northumberland Archives, and in January updated its Northumberland nonconformist collection (1613–1920), which now contains 452,000 records (**tinyurl.com/fs-northum-noncon**), while Bishops' Transcripts from the Durham diocese (1639–1919) are at **tinyurl.com/fs-dur-bts**.

FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) is now approaching 1.4 million Northumberland records, and a further 677,000 for Durham.

### Durham Records Online £

w **durhamrecordsonline.com**

This website has more than 10.4 million names across census and parish material. Staindrop baptisms (1666–1717) and banns (1754–1799) were added in February, along with batches of 18th-century burials from Berwick-upon-Tweed.

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St Martin's Church, Birmingham, 1858

# The West Midlands

Birmingham, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire

Although Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has the widest coverage in this part of England, both Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) have useful collections. The latter's books include records from Herefordshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire and Warwickshire (with images). It also has a partnership with Malvern Family History Society (**mfhs.org.uk**), which has produced data from registers held at the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service.

Findmypast added new transcriptions for Herefordshire in August last year, including some 231,270 new baptisms (making 900,000 in total), 86,782 new marriages and 300,517 burials.

The website also expanded its long-running National Burial Index (covering England and Wales), which was bolstered by a further 122,691 brand-new transcriptions from Herefordshire.

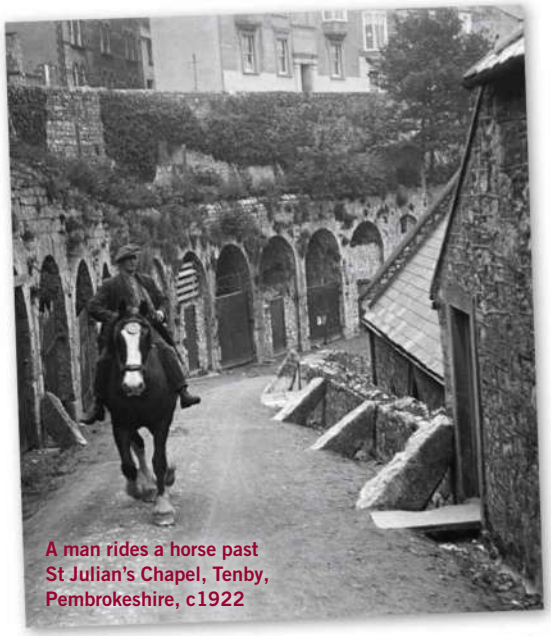
FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) has Staffordshire registers and Hereford Bishops' Transcripts (1583–1898) totalling 1.6 million entries and updated in late 2022. In the same year the website also added 134,000 browsable images of Warwickshire parish registers containing 2.9 million names.

As for FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**), its coverage is Staffordshire 4,296,746, Warwickshire 1,163,845, Worcestershire 1,091,089, Shropshire 278,544 and Herefordshire 20,493.

### Ancestry £

w **ancestry.co.uk**

Ancestry dominates the West Midlands with its parish register collection. The site has 6.5 million records for Birmingham, 4.1 million for Warwickshire, five million for Shropshire and nine million for Staffordshire. Its Worcestershire collection, which now boasts more than 10 million records, was recently updated to include births up to 1922, marriages up to 1947 and burials up to 1997.



A man rides a horse past St Julian's Chapel, Tenby, Pembrokeshire, c1922

# Wales

The main genealogy websites all offer impressive collections of parish registers from Wales

Although the church in Wales, as in England, was required to keep parish registers by law from 1538, the reality is that survival rates for early parish registers in Wales is very poor compared with England. On top of that, a much higher proportion of the Welsh were nonconformist, meaning that if you can't find your Welsh ancestor in Anglican records, you may need to look at nonconformist collections. The National Library of Wales (**library.wales**) has Anglican parish registers from nearly 500 parishes, plus Bishops' Transcripts from all Welsh dioceses. The library and the Welsh County Archivists Group have provided Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) and Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) with Welsh baptism, banns, marriage and burial records, which include both images and transcripts and total about eight million records covering all 13 historic Welsh counties. All three websites also have a large number of nonconformist records taken from a collection at The National Archives.

### FamilySearch Free

w **familysearch.org**

The collection 'Wales, Parish Registers, 1678–1950' has Church of Wales registers filmed at Ceredigion Archives. There were also updates to various counties in 2023, including Pembrokeshire, which by November last year totalled 320,664 entries, plus Glamorgan/Glamorganshire (922,000/744,000) and Denbighshire (719,000).

GETTY IMAGES

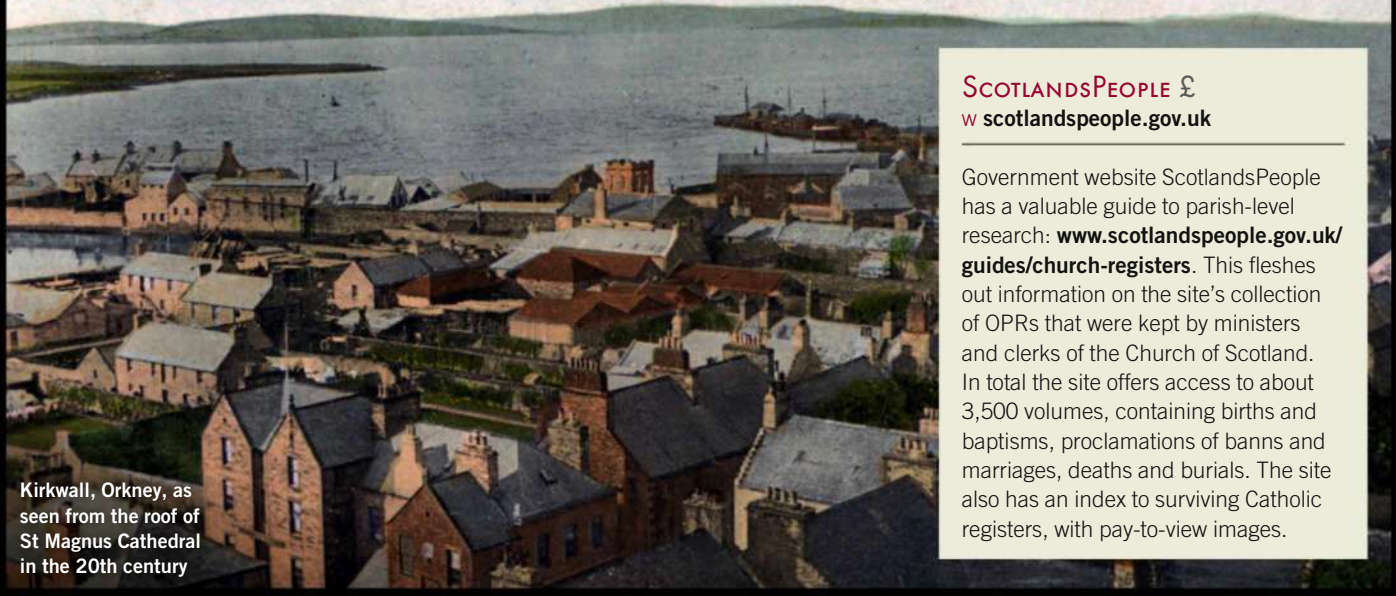
# Scotland

FamilySearch, Findmypast and ScotlandsPeople are the most important sites if you have Scottish ancestry

Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) registers of baptisms, marriage proclamations and burials are collectively known as Old Parish Registers (OPRs). When researching OPRs, it is important to keep in mind that over time the Church underwent secessions and schisms that resulted in a number of breakaway factions. And as noted on the ScotlandsPeople website (**scotlandspeople.gov.uk**): "Registration in the Church of Scotland's registers was costly and unpopular, so many people did not bother to register events at all."

FamilySearch holdings include 'Scotland Church Records and Kirk Session Records, 1658–1919' (**familysearch.org/search/collection/2390848**): records of synods, presbyteries and kirk sessions containing registers filmed at the National Archives of Scotland (CH2 series). This was added back in July 2020 and contains about 300,000 records. Around the same time the site also updated the hefty births and baptisms collection spanning 1564–1950, which has more than eight million records.

Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has expanded its Scottish parish collection in recent years. It passed the 10 million mark two years ago, and in May last year a further 4,000 transcriptions from Nairnshire arrived on the scene. Also, some of these transcribed registers contain much more recent entries not yet available elsewhere.



Kirkwall, Orkney, as seen from the roof of St Magnus Cathedral in the 20th century

### ScotlandsPeople £

w **scotlandspeople.gov.uk**

Government website ScotlandsPeople has a valuable guide to parish-level research: **www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/guides/church-registers**. This fleshes out information on the site's collection of OPRs that were kept by ministers and clerks of the Church of Scotland. In total the site offers access to about 3,500 volumes, containing births and baptisms, proclamations of banns and marriages, deaths and burials. The site also has an index to surviving Catholic registers, with pay-to-view images.

# Northern Ireland

When it comes to digitisation, you're in luck if your Northern Irish ancestors were Catholic

While Ireland's population was mostly Roman Catholic, the area that is now Northern Ireland was predominantly Protestant. Unfortunately, there are few Church of Ireland records online, including these at the Anglican Record Project (**www.ireland.anglican.org/about/rcb-library/anglican-record-project**). Indexes for some Presbyterian church records can be found at **presbyterianhistoryireland.com** and although Methodist records have not made it online, you can find out more about what survives at **methodisthistoryireland.org.**

More records are online if your ancestors were Catholic. The digitised Catholic registers held by the National Archives of Ireland have been indexed by Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). The collection is made up of records from more than 1,000 Catholic parishes across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Derry/Londonderry, as seen in an engraving from c1800

Ulster Historical Foundation's pay-per-view datasets (**ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com/genealogy-databases/list**) include marriage, burial, and birth and baptism collections for County Antrim and County Down between c1660 and 1930. These contain virtually all Roman Catholic registers for the two counties prior to 1900, in addition to a large number of Protestant (especially Church of Ireland) registers.

Also try Roots Ireland's Armagh page (**armagh.rootsireland.ie**).

### National Library Of Ireland Free

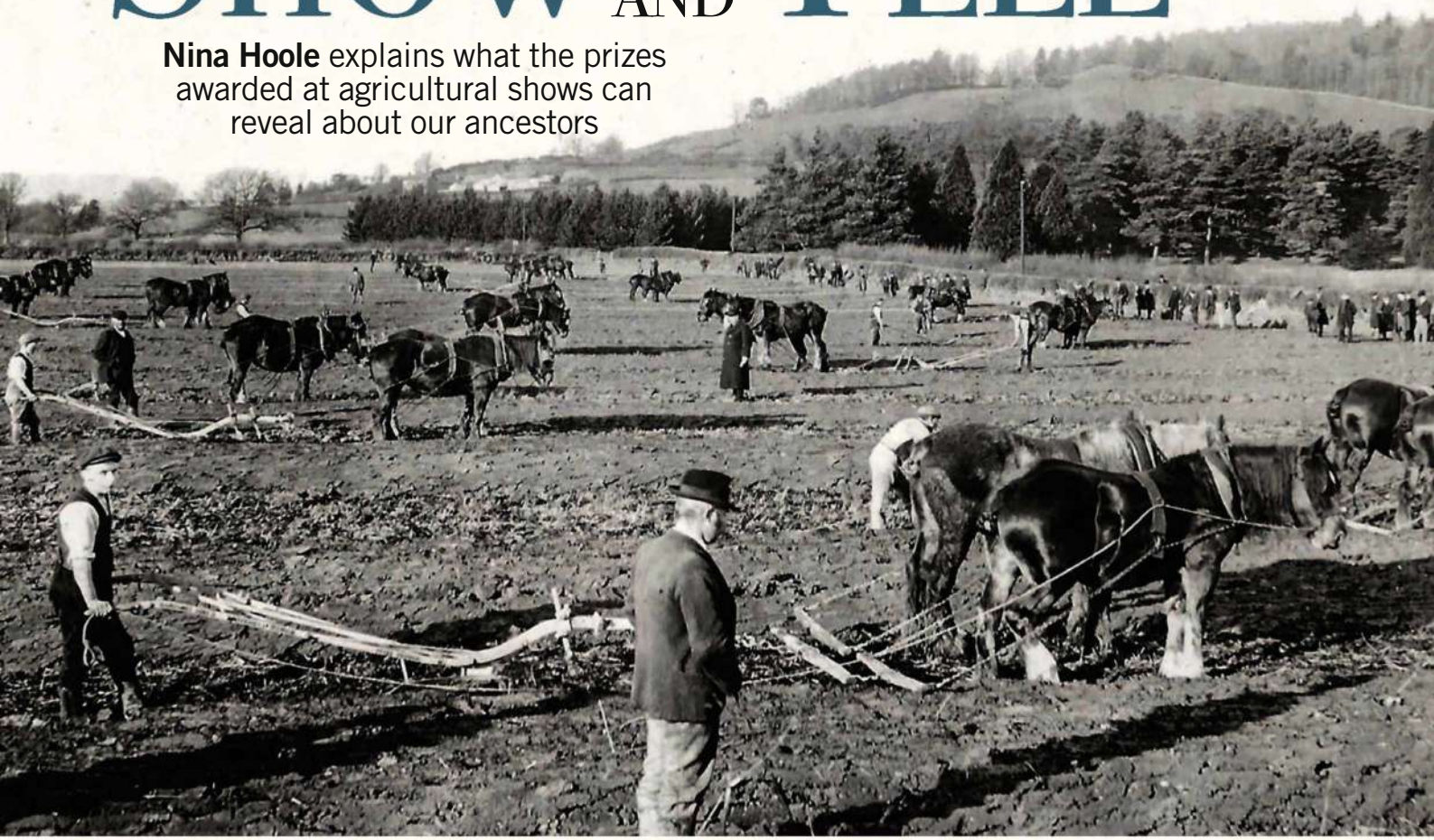
w **registers.nli.ie**

The NLI's microfilmed registers from Catholic parishes have been made freely available via this website. Although the site only offers images, these often link to indexes and transcriptions via Irish Ancestors (**johngrenham.com**), Roots Ireland (**rootsireland.ie**) and Irish Genealogy (**irishgenealogy.ie**).

GETTY IMAGES

# Show and Tell

**Nina Hoole** explains what the prizes awarded at agricultural shows can reveal about our ancestors



Ploughmen could test their skills in competitions at agricultural shows

The humble agricultural labourer is often absent from historical records. However, the prizes awarded at agricultural shows can tell you that your forebear excelled at ploughing or could grow impressive vegetables, and reveal even more valuable personal information.

Breconshire Agricultural Society in South Wales was the first county agricultural society, set up in 1755. Such institutions were originally the preserve of the aristocracy and gentry, promoting innovation in agriculture and sharing best practice. Then, from the late 1700s, provincial societies took off. Agricultural shows were a later development to help further societies' aims, with cattle shows, ploughing matches and dinners. Local landowners could win recognition for prime livestock, and sponsor prizes to encourage wholesome attitudes among the 'deserving poor'.

Such prizes, or premiums, could also be funded from a society's membership subscriptions or donations by individuals. They were usually a monetary sum, which could be equivalent to a week's pay. At a show in Melksham, Wiltshire, in 1864, recipients also received framed testimonials and in some cases silver spoons, whereas at other shows new coats and gowns were also presented. Agricultural premiums could be for developing a new farming implement or the growing and harvesting of a new crop, while social premiums focused on rewarding labourers' skill, conduct or self-sufficiency.

**Social premiums rewarded labourers' skill, conduct and self-sufficiency**

The prize categories for social premiums could be wide-ranging or very specific: in the West Midlands, Warwickshire Agricultural Society's 1872 show offered a premium "to those who shall have resided in the County and maintained themselves and family consisting of not less than five legitimate Children, each of which shall have lived to the age of five years, the greater number of years from the day of marriage without parochial relief except in illness". Alford Agricultural Society in Lincolnshire had categories for the "Female Servant of good character, under 40 years of age,

Leicestershire Agricultural Society awarded this prize certificate in 1873

never having been a Housekeeper, who shall have been the longest and most regular Depositor in a Savings Bank" and the "Waggoner who shall have lived the greatest number of years in that capacity in the fewest servitudes, without having been intoxicated whilst out with his Master's team and providing a satisfactory character from each Master or Mistress".

In advance of a show, advertisements would appear in the local newspapers, advising potential applicants how to enter, and letters were sent out to the land-owning members of that society to encourage recommendations. Candidates for both the South East Hants Society and the West Sussex Agricultural Society had to regularly attend church or chapel, and supply a certificate of character signed by their minister, employer or overseer. Also, in many societies anyone who won first place in a category was not entitled to enter that category in subsequent years.

The presentation of prizes varied between societies: some had an annual dinner for their upper-class members, and the wining labourers came in and out collecting their prizes. Others invited their winning labourers to stay for the entire dinner.

So how can these prizes be used to further your family history?

## Researching John Edworth

I have a family of farming ancestors near Grantham in Lincolnshire, whose surname is variously recorded as Hedworth, Headworth and Edworth. Among their prizes mentioned in the newspapers was one that confused me, in an article reporting on the Leicestershire Agricultural Society premiums in 1847: "John Edworth, farm labourer to TC Beasley of Harston, for having brought up nine children without parochial relief, £5."

Having already found John on censuses, and got all the baptisms I could find from parish records, I'd only discovered five children. Now it seemed like I was missing a further four.

I could also see from the citation that John Edworth had never claimed parochial relief, so I didn't need to spend time hunting through Poor Law records. Most ag labs were only paid when they worked, and since the job was seasonal, many would have had to claim poor relief at some point. John must have been fortunate.

Several of his prizes related to working for the same employer for a long time: 44½ years at his final prize in 1864, so I knew he'd started working for the landowner TC Beasley in about 1820.

Thomas Calvert Beasley was a land agent for Sir William Earle Welby-Gregory, and since I was able to discover that Beasley managed the Denton Estate, I looked into the estate papers held at Lincolnshire Archives.

This was how the breakthrough came. The accounts listed the tenants for each village, with how much rent was due and any arrears owed. I easily found John Edworth, but after a few years the spelling varied between Edworth and Edwards, although it was clearly the same tenancy. The £5 he won in 1847 would have been equivalent to over two years' rent – but whatever he spent the winnings on, it wasn't that because he was over £7 in arrears for several years.

More importantly, combining this new insight into the spelling vagaries of his surname with information I already had, I was finally able to find his marriage, all four missing baptisms and a previously elusive burial for his wife, all under the name Edwards.

His seemingly innocuous prizes actually provided the lead I needed to demolish a long-standing brick wall.

Nina Hoole is a family historian and writer

## Resources

**Nina recommends these four websites for researching ag labs**

### British Newspaper Archive

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

Prize announcements were often published in local newspapers.

### Discovery

w **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**

Agricultural societies ranged from the very local, to county or even national. See if a local archive holds records using The National Archives' online catalogue. You can also search Discovery for records of the estate a relation worked on.

### The Museum Of English Rural Life

w **merl.reading.ac.uk**

The museum's website features many online exhibitions.

### The Royal Highland And Agricultural Society Of Scotland

w **archive.rhass.org.uk/archive**

Here you can search digitised volumes of the society's transactions (1790–1969), including details of prizes.

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

# 'My Ancestors Lived Among Border Reivers'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

*WDYTYA? Magazine* contributor **Gail Dixon** has been astonished to trace her Northumbrian farming forebears back to the 16th century

Growing up in Redesdale, one of life's great pleasures was riding my horse Molly over the sunlit hillsides. The valley is in the idyllic Northumberland National Park, and 10 miles south of the border with Scotland.

It's hard to imagine that a few centuries earlier, Redesdale was one of the most violent places in England. This was due to cut-throat marauders known as 'reivers' who terrorised the Borders from the 13th century until the 1600s.

Our farm was near the hamlet of Rochester, where the site of a Roman fort called Bremenium was excavated. I knew a little of our ancestry – the Dixons had farmed in Redesdale for at least a century, and we had connections with the nearby village of Elsdon.

As a child, I used to play in Elsdon on the grassy banks of the Mote Hills, which were the remains of a medieval motte and bailey castle. I gave little thought to any ancestors who may have lived there.

**Leonard volunteered in 1914 even though he was exempt from service**

Gail's paternal grandmother Hannah Ochiltrie Hunter *(right)*

My parents were Mary Kathleen Newton, a neurosurgery nurse from Tyneside, and Peter Dixon, who was born and raised in Rochester. They met at a ball, and married in 1965.

Dad was a farmer all his life, and a keen sportsman. He played centre forward for Elsdon's football team, and had a cabinet that was full of trophies.

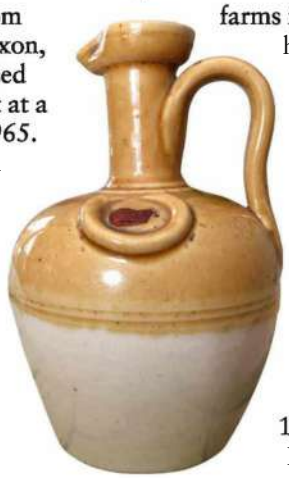
I remember my grandad Leonard Dixon as a silent man, shrouded in puffs of pipe smoke. He was born in Rochester in 1890, and managed to reach the grand age of 86.

## Brave Decision

Leonard fought during the First World War in the Royal Field Artillery, volunteering in 1914 even though he was exempt from service as a farmer. He was also a horse whisperer, and would have comforted animals enduring the horrors of the Western Front.

Leonard married the wonderfully named Hannah Ochiltrie Hunter, who was Redesdale's district nurse. Grandma Hannah loved fancy dress, and I have one of her Victorian crinolines, which fitted me when I was 10.

Like most Dixons, Leonard preferred talk of farming, horses and dogs. However, if asked about the ancestors he would say, "They're all in the churchyard in Elsdon." He also recalled that at one time there were four farms in the family. What had become of this formidable estate?



Gail's great grandfather James Dixon's whisky jar

In adulthood, I was always fascinated by genealogy but university, a long career in publishing and the birth of my son Callum Peter kept me occupied. So I only started actively researching 15 years ago.

Leonard's parents were farmer James Dixon and his wife Margaret Leonard, of Berwick-upon-Tweed. Margaret's father John was an engine driver in the early days of steam. James' whisky jar is one of my prized possessions – I wish it could tell me tales of the past.

James and Margaret lived in an elegant home called Hopesley House in Rochester. They were ▶

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# *Gail Dixon's* Family Tree

- William Nicholson died 1661 = Isobel
  - Ralph Nicholson died 1698
    - William Nicholson 1691–1724 = Anne Lamb 1688–1766
      - Ralph Nicholson 1717–1796 = Mary Paterson 1716–1802
        - Edward Nicholson 1753–1809 = Jane Charlton 1764–1841
          - John Dickson/Dixon 1778–1855 = Mary Nicholson 1790–1866
            - John Dixon 1815–1888 = Sarah Peary 1817–1891
              - James Dixon 1852–1924 = Margaret R Leonard 1860–1910
                - Leonard Dixon 1890–1977 = Hannah O Hunter 1889–1960
                - Peter Dixon 1929–1998 = Mary Kathleen Newton 1941–1997
                - John Carey Newton 1918–1982 = Catherine Foster 1917–1977
                - Gail Dixon

Gail holds a photo of her mother Mary Kathleen Dixon (née Newton)

great believers in education, especially for girls. As a result Leonard and his five sisters were all sent away to private boarding school.

Coincidences began to emerge as I delved into the past. Parish records revealed that James was born in 1852 at Horsley Inn, which became the Redesdale Arms hotel. This was a former coaching inn near our beautiful farm, and I used to work there myself during the holidays.

## Farmers Turned Innkeepers

James' parents were John Dixon and his wife Sarah Peary, who farmed at Warton, near Rothbury, Northumberland. They moved to Redesdale in around 1847 to run the inn and farm 1,000 acres.

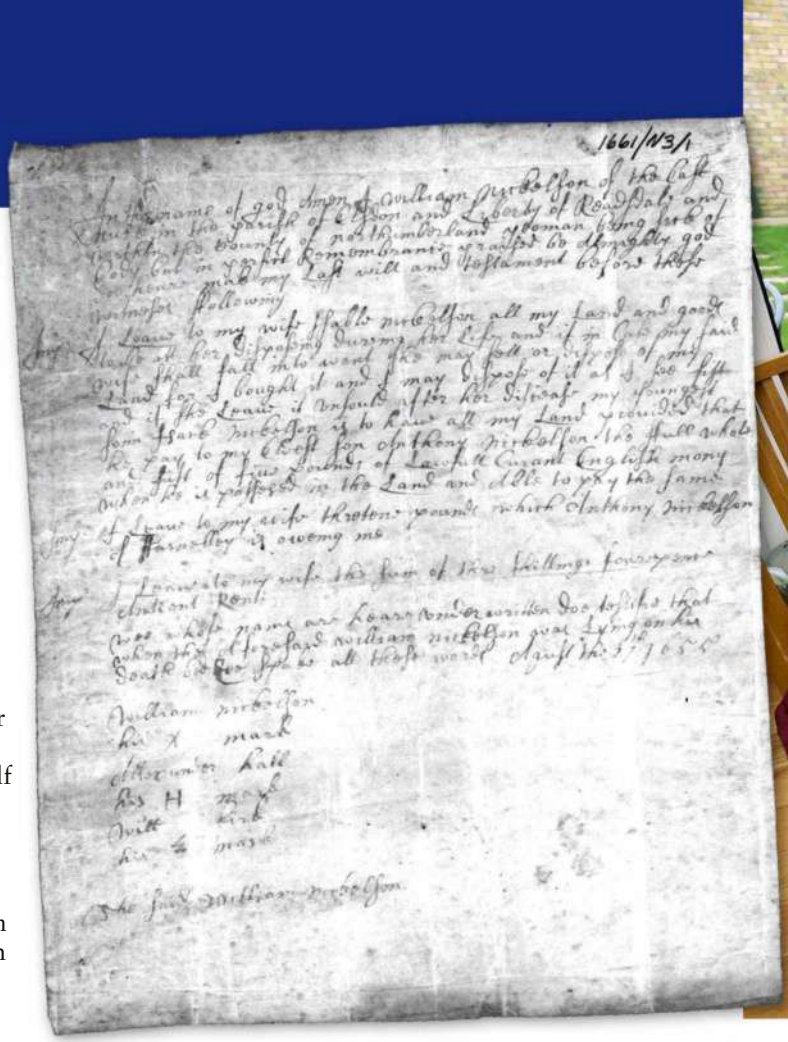
Local directories revealed that horse-drawn mail coaches used to stop at the Redesdale Arms. I imagined John, Sarah and their staff rushing out to meet passengers who were travelling between Edinburgh and Newcastle.

James Dixon had five brothers and a sister, so I couldn't help wondering why Leonard was the only descendant of the family in Redesdale. Death records revealed the unfortunate answer.

Tragedy struck the Dixons in the late 19th century, with illnesses such as tuberculosis claiming the lives of James' siblings John, Edward, Mary and Christopher while they were young adults.

It was especially awful to discover that his three-year-old brother Andrew died of water on the brain in 1860. I remembered, with a shiver, that hotel guests in modern times would mention that they'd heard a baby crying in the night, when none was staying. Was this an echo of the past?

John and Sarah died in 1888 and 1891 respectively, and were buried with their children at Holy Trinity Church, Horsley, which we could see from the kitchen window of our farmhouse. The couple had prospered, and left a business, houses and livestock for James and his surviving brother Thomas.


1661/113/1

The will of Gail's 8x great grandfather William Nicholson from 1655

I was ready to delve into John Dixon's past now, but the trail became opaque. He was born in 1815 at Whitefield Estate, Hepple, near Rothbury. His parents were estate manager John Dickson (sometimes Dixon) and his wife Mary Nicholson.

John senior appeared on the 1841 and 1851 census giving his birthplace simply as "Scotland". Finding out more proved tricky, so I chanced my arm and Googled "John Dickson, Whitefield". I gasped when a record appeared relating to account books that John had kept in 1815. These were held at Northumberland Archives near Ashington (**tinyurl.com/northum-arch**).

I live in Buckinghamshire, so I emailed the archivist and paid for images of the accounts. Seeing my 3x great grandfather's signatures made my spine tingle.

John's signature matched the one on his 1814 marriage to Mary Nicholson of Elsdon. Everything was now falling into place: this marriage connected the Dixon family to Elsdon.

Wonders emerged when I turned my attention to Mary Nicholson. A volume of parish registers from St Cuthbert's Church, Elsdon, that I found on the Internet Archive (**archive.org**) proved invaluable. Fortunately, the curates had listed the names of the farms where they lived, so I could cross-reference these with wills, census returns and electoral rolls.

Mary was born in 1790 to yeoman Edward Nicholson and his wife Jane Charlton at East Todholes Farm, Elsdon. Jane's brother Richard inherited that farm in 1788.

## Will Revelations

Family wills revealed that Edward owned Boorshiel (Bowershield) Farm, at Elsdon. He died in 1809 and passed Boorshiel and a nearby farm called Hudspeth to his sons, Ralph and Thomas. They later acquired Birks Farm at Tarset, near Kielder. I was delighted to uncover the four farms that Leonard had spoken of.

Edward's father Ralph Nicholson (born in 1717) owned a farm called East Nook, near Elsdon. I was astonished to discover via probate records that

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Gail's father Peter won prizes at country shows for the walking sticks that he made

East Nook was owned in 1655 by my 8x great grandfather William Nicholson.

The revelations kept coming. Leonard had mentioned a link to the acclaimed landscape designer Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, whose parents were born in Elsdon. The parish records revealed that my 6x great grandmother Anne Nicholson's daughter Sarah married Lancelot's cousin.

The most astonishing moment came when a researcher sent me the notes of a lecture given in Rochester by historian J Nichol in 1914. It was called 'Life in Redesdale in Bygone Days', and gave details of the valley's history.

Nichol referred to documents compiled by the Lord Wardens of the Marches, who were responsible for the security of the Scotland–England border and tried to establish order during the chaos. I was relieved to see that the Nicholsons weren't on the list of Redesdale's most notorious felons.

Nichol also included the 'Boke of the Names of the Inhabitants of Ryddesdale'. This census of approximately 100 men was compiled in 1528 by the Earl of Northumberland and sent to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, and a copy had been preserved among his estate.

## Tudor Connection

Thanks to records, I knew that we had a long line of ancestors called Ralph Nicholson in Elsdon. I needed a lie-down when I saw the name Rauf Nicholson on the earl's list. I was convinced that he was my ancestor, which meant that our family had lived in Elsdon since Tudor times.

It's astonishing that my family made it through the Reivers' reign of terror. Nichol explained that in 1584 the inhabitants of Elsdon complained "that the Elliots and Armstrongs to the number of 400 men came there and burnt the town, killed 14 men, took 200 prisoners, drove away 200 kye (cows), 100 horses, and ransomed all the prisoners".

How did the beleaguered people of Redesdale cope? Many lived in fortified barns ('bastles'). The cattle would be brought into the ground floor, and the farmers lived upstairs. They had hatches to the upper floors with ladders that were drawn up at night, in case the reivers came. That is how our brave Nicholsons survived.

I'm equally proud of Mum's family, especially my beloved grandmother Catherine Foster and her Irish ancestors, who immigrated to Newcastle during the Great Famine (1845–1849). I often think of her and my kind grandfather John Carey Newton, who was an officer in the Merchant Navy. His ships were torpedoed three times during wartime, and he had to cling to driftwood to survive. I'm so grateful to my ancestors for their pluck, determination and love.

## TELL YOUR STORY

**Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

The gravestone for Ralph Nicholson, brother of Gail's 3x great grandmother Mary Nicholson, at St Cuthbert's, Elsdon, mentions their farm Hudspeth

UNP/DAVE FLEMMING

## Resources

**These resources helped Gail research her Northumbrian kin**

**ARCHIVE**

### Northumberland Archives

a QEII Country Park, Ashington NE63 9YF
t 01670 624358
e *archives@northumberland.gov.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/northum-arch**

Gail found accounts compiled by her 3x great grandfather in 1815 in Northumberland Archives. She was able to order copies, and match his signature with that of his marriage entry.

**WEBSITES**

### Internet Archive

w **tinyurl.com/arch-elsd**

You will find many out-of-print genealogical books freely available in the Internet Archive. *The Register of Baptisms, Marriages & Burials Solemnized in the Ancient Parish Church of Elsdon* (Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1903) was a revelation. It gave the names of the farms where Gail's ancestors lived, which matched with wills and electoral rolls.

### North East Inheritance Database

w **familyrecords.dur.ac.uk/nei/data/intro.php**

This initiative from Durham University Library includes pre-1858 probate records (wills and related documents).

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Genealogist **Nicola Morris** explains how you can use digitised newspapers to locate your Irish ancestors

BRITISH LIBRARY

Newspapers began to be published in Ireland from the late 17th century. However, it is not until the middle of the 18th century that they start to become useful for researching family history.

From the 1750s, the publication of birth, marriage and death notices, generally pertaining to the landed gentry and professional classes, can sometimes bridge the gap left by the destruction of church, testamentary and court records in the 1922 fire at the Public Record Office in Dublin during the Civil War.

Birth announcements during this early period are the least informative, stating that the unnamed wife of a gentleman gave birth to a son or daughter. The location and father's name are published, but little else.

Farming people in County Kilkenny, south-east Ireland, in the mid-19th century return from the market

Marriage notices can sometimes be more detailed, with references to the name and address of the bride's father or parents, the occupation of the groom, and the names of the minister and church where it took place.

Death notices can be the most informative and should at least include name, age and place of death. Some notices will refer to the occupation of the deceased and even information on their spouse, children, siblings or parents.

Locating an announcement of marriage or death overseas will explain the absence of a record in Ireland. A request in later death notices asking for American, Australian or English newspapers to please copy, suggests family members who had emigrated to those places.

In addition to death notices, you may find an obituary or a funeral notice elsewhere in the newspaper. Obituaries offer a more detailed account of the deceased's life and family. Funeral notices, largely found in 20th-century Irish newspapers, can be very informative, identifying the mourners, often naming married daughters, grandchildren and cousins, as well as the place of burial.

## Early Advertisements

Early newspapers also served to circulate information to the population. Most early newspapers carried advertisements, but these are not adverts as we think of them today. Early advertisements were more like noticeboard items for the local readership, informing the public that a business

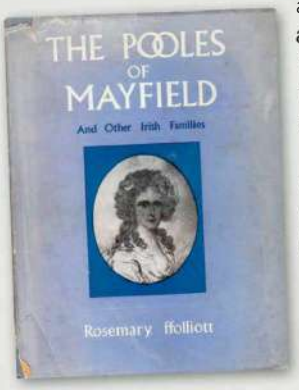
GETTY IMAGES

## Rosemary Ffolliot 1935–2009

**This brilliant researcher unlocked vital information in Irish newspapers**

Rosemary Ffolliot was one of Ireland's most respected and well-known genealogists. Born in 1935 she published her first book *The Pooles of Mayfield* (1958) at the age of 23, beginning her documentation of the landed families of Cork. Ffolliott became a fellow of the Irish Genealogical Research Society (IGRS), editor of the society's journal *The Irish Ancestor* and one of the freelance genealogists at the Genealogical Office in Dublin. Renowned for her disciplined and meticulous work, Ffolliott raised the standards of genealogical research in Ireland. She died in 2009.

During the course of her work, Ffolliott extracted biographical information from historic Irish newspapers, particularly for families living in the province of Munster in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These abstracts, organised alphabetically by surname and now online at Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), are an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the landed families of Munster, and Ireland in general.




In fact, Ffolliott was not the only genealogist and local historian who extracted and published biographical information from newspapers, before the arrival of the internet and digitisation. The IGRS's journal *The Irish Genealogist*, among other publications, includes transcripts of biographical details extracted from the Irish press, saving the researcher hours, days or even months of work. The publication of searchable digitised Irish newspapers online has, to a certain extent, undermined these collections of extracts. However, not all newspapers are online and imperfect search engines may not be able to find what the human eye once painstakingly located and transcribed for the benefit of the family historian.

# Newspaper Extract, 1818

These notices of births, marriages and deaths were published in *Freeman's Journal* on 17 April 1818. This edition of the newspaper has been digitised and is available via the Irish Newspaper Archives (**irishnewsarchive.com**)

**1 E Whyte**
This birth notice only names the father and sex of the child, as was the custom at the time.

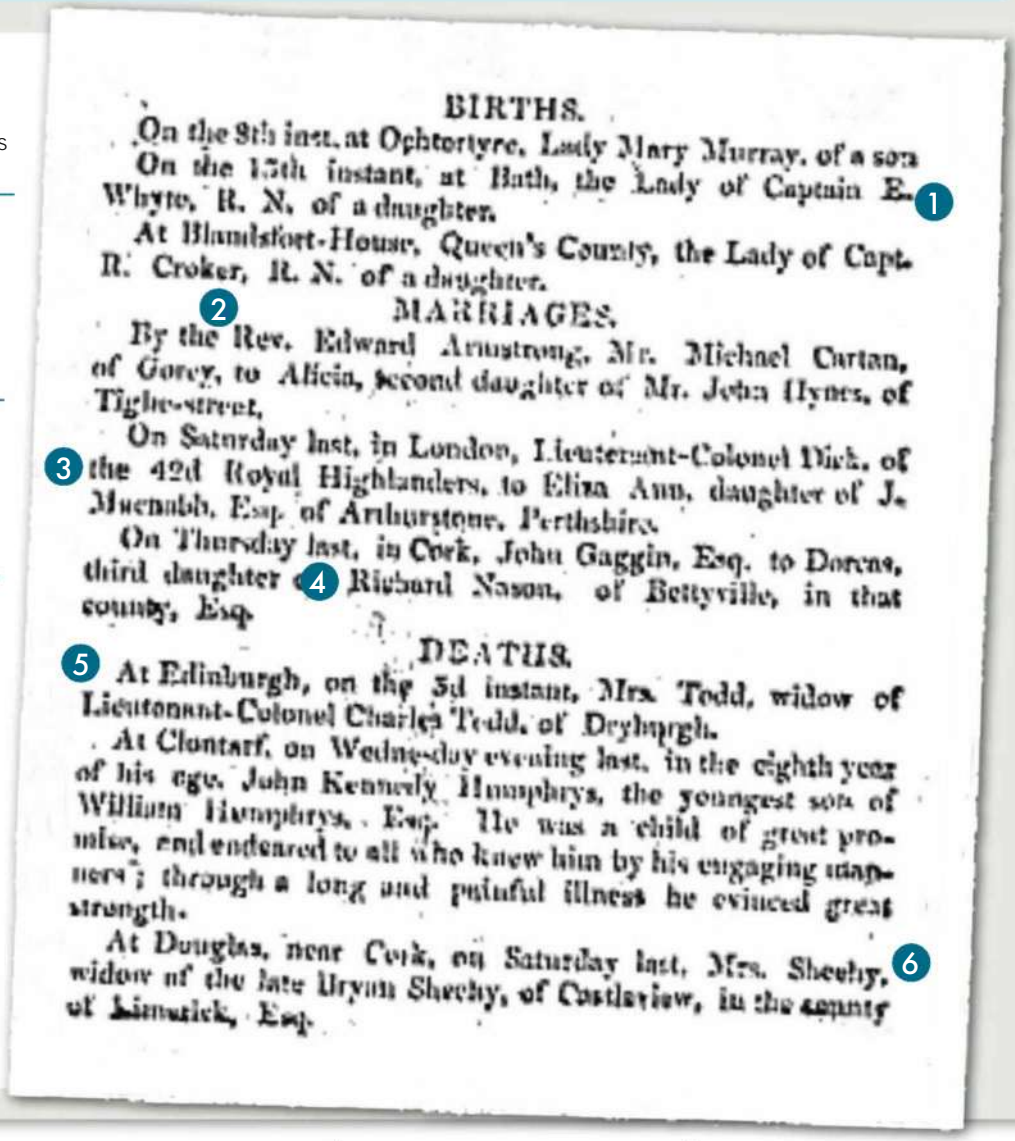
**2 Rev Armstrong**
The name of the minister who conducted the marriage – here Rev Edward Armstrong – should point to the bride and groom's religious denomination.

**3 42d Royal Highlanders**
The groom's regiment might enable you to research details of his military service.

**4 Richard Nason**
The name of the father of the bride is recorded, as well as his address.

**5 Edinburgh**
Irish newspapers also published notices for births, marriages and deaths in England, Scotland and Wales.

**6 Mrs Sheehy**
Mrs Sheehy's late husband is identified, along with his address and her place of death.



BIRTHS.

On the 8th inst. at Ochtertyre, Lady Mary Murray, of a son

On the 13th instant, at Bath, the Lady of Captain E. Whyte, R. N. of a daughter. 1

At Blanisfort-House, Queen's County, the Lady of Capt. R. Croker, R. N. of a daughter.

2 MARRIAGES.

By the Rev. Edward Armstrong, Mr. Michael Curtan, of Gorey, to Alicia, second daughter of Mr. John Hynes, of Tighe-street.

On Saturday last, in London, Lieutenant-Colonel Dick, of 3 the 42d Royal Highlanders, to Eliza Ann, daughter of J. Macnabb, Esq. of Arbuthnot, Perthshire.

On Thursday last, in Cork, John Gaggin, Esq. to Dorcas, third daughter of 4 Richard Nason, of Bettyville, in that county, Esq.

5 DEATHS.

At Edinburgh, on the 3d instant, Mrs. Todd, widow of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Todd, of Drybrgh.

At Clontarf, on Wednesday evening last, in the eighth year of his age, John Kennedy Humphrys, the youngest son of William Humphrys, Esq. He was a child of great promise, and endeared to all who knew him by his engaging manners; through a long and painful illness he evinced great strength.

At Douglas, near Cork, on Saturday last, Mrs. Sheehy, 6 widow of the late Bryan Sheehy, of Castleview, in the county of Limerick, Esq.

had changed hands or been taken over by the wife or son of a deceased proprietor. Advertisements notified a change of business address, or a request for the assembly of creditors. Teachers advertised for pupils, and authorities advertised details of absconded soldiers or escaped prisoners.

Personal notices also appear, such as the elopement of a couple, or a husband notifying local businesses that he will no longer pay the bills of his errant wife. Over two issues of Faulkner's *Dublin Journal*, published in June 1763, Isaac Read firstly notifies readers that his wife Mary "hath not only behaved in a most unbecoming way to her said husband but hath joined with some wicked malicious and ill minded people in order to hurt him and his children", adding that he has separated from her so she is not to be given any credit on his accounts.

In the following edition Mary Read published her response, correcting her husband's claims, "to be turned out of doors by force, without being permitted to take with her even a change of linen, or any one necessary, be considered by him as a separation which should discharge him from the support of a wife, by whom he has for upwards of 13 years enjoyed… a very considerable annual income". Such notifications began to disappear from about the 1830s, as advertising became more commercial.

Newspapers do not offer a comprehensive record of the entire population. In the 18th and 19th centuries they generally published announcements relating to the gentry, military, professional classes, clergy, merchant families, wealthy farmers and some traders. Prior to the 20th century,

**TOP TIP!**
Keep your research focused by identifying the newspapers specific to your ancestors' location then finding out if they are online or available in an archive.

the majority of the Irish population, small tenant farmers and the urban poor, are absent from this source, with the exception of those caught up in a crime.

Most court records for 18th- and 19th-century Ireland were destroyed. Newspaper reporting on the commission and prosecution of crimes and subsequent punishment are often the only surviving record. This is a particularly significant resource for anyone whose relation was transported to Australia for petty crimes.

## Locating Newspapers

Fortunately, Ireland has a wealth of historic newspapers. From 1826, the British Library (**bl.uk**) was obliged to hold a copy of all Irish publications and its collection of Irish newspapers is largely complete, along with an extensive collection of pre-1826 publications.

The National Library of Ireland (NLI; **nli.ie**) holds the largest collection of Irish newspapers on the island. *Newsplan*, published in 1992 and 1998, is a record of what Irish newspapers survive, and where hard and microfilm copies can be located. The publication, with an informative introduction, lists newspapers by title and by town of publication, helping you to identify newspapers relevant to a specific area. A digital copy of the 1998 second edition can be viewed in the NLI's catalogue (**tinyurl.com/nli-cat-newsplan**), or borrowed for free from the Internet Archive (**archive.org**) at **tinyurl.com/arch-newsplan**.

Some, but certainly not all, Irish newspapers have been digitised and published online. There are two major online collections of Irish newspapers, the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**) and the Irish Newspaper Archives (**irishnewsarchive.com**). Although some publications appear in both, the collections are generally different. The titles on the British Newspaper Archive are held by the British Library, and are also available to Findmypast subscribers at 'Pro' level or above (**findmypast.co.uk/search-newspapers**).

There are several ways to approach newspaper research. A manual search, if you have time, can often be the most rewarding. Manual research can be carried out online by browsing a digital copy of a newspaper, or using microfilm or hard copies in a library. However, a manual search will really only be practical if you have a relatively narrow date

ROBINSON & CLEAVER, BELFAST.
Grand Diploma of Honour, Edinburgh, 1890;
Two Prize Medals, Paris, 1889.
IRISH CAMBRIC POCKET HANDKERCHIEFS.
Children's Bordered, 1/3; Ladies', 2/3; Gents', 3/3 per doz.
Hemstitched—Ladies', 2/9; Gents', 3/11 per doz.
IRISH DAMASK TABLE AND HOUSE LINEN.
Irish Napkins, 2/11 per doz. Dinner Napkins, 5/6 per doz. Table Cloths, 2 yards square, 2/11; 2½ yards by 3 yards, 5/11 each. Kitchen Table Cloths, 11½d. each. Strong Huckaback Towels, 4/6 per doz. Frilled Linen Pillow Cases from 1/2½ each. Monograms, Crests, Coats of Arms, Initials, &c.
IRISH LINEN COLLARS, CUFFS, AND SHIRTS.
"The Irish Linen Collars, Cuffs, Shirts, &c., have the merits of excellence and cheapness."—*Court Circular.*
COLLARS.—Ladies' and Children's 3-fold, 3/6 per doz. Gents' 4-fold, 4/11 per doz.
CUFFS.—For Ladies, Gentlemen, and Children, from 5/11 per doz.
MATCHLESS SHIRTS, with 4-fold fine linen fronts and cuffs, and finest longcloth bodies, 35/6 per half-doz.; to measure, 2/- extra.
N.B.—Can also be supplied with extra wide fronts, for evening wear, either in fine linen or corded pique, at same price.
*Shirts rebanded, fronted, and cuffed for 14s. the half-doz*
Samples and Illustrated Price Lists Post Free.
ROBINSON & CLEAVER (By appointments to the Queen and Empress Frederick of Germany), BELFAST.

If you know the name of your Irish relation's employer, see if the company is mentioned in news stories or advertisements

# Expert Picks

Nicola recommends these three websites for sourcing Irish newspapers

### British Newspaper Archive

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

This subscription website includes digitised Irish newspapers held by the British Library, and is slightly better for early material than the Irish Newspaper Archives.

### Irish Newspaper Archives

w **irishnewsarchive.com**

Another subscription site, this offers more than six million newspaper pages back to 1738, including a large regional component and a number of radical titles.

### National Library Of Ireland

w **nli.ie**

The library's online catalogue lists the newspapers in its collection. Hyperlinks to the Irish Newspaper Archives are included if the newspaper in question has been digitised.

GETTY IMAGES

Ruined buildings and a barricade of cars on Sackville Street in Dublin during the 1916 Easter Rising

range and location. If you have a date of death then a death notice, obituary or funeral notice should be found in local papers over the following two weeks, if the death was local, bearing in mind that many newspapers only published one or two editions each week. This approach will often turn up notices that are missed by search engines.

## Problematic Searching

If you don't have a specific date range then a manual search will not be practical and you will have to rely on search engines, which might uncover fewer references to a family than expected. Driven by optical character recognition, search engines can fail when a crease or tear in the page, smudged ink or words obliterated by tight binding obscure the text you are searching for.

When using a search engine, it is also important to consider how someone might have been reported. Patrick Murphy might appear as "Pat Murphy" or "Mr. P. Murphy". When searching for someone with a common name, it is usually sensible to search by their address, often a townland. However, addresses can be reported using the official spelling found in the Index of Townlands, or the local spelling, which is often what appears on birth, marriage and death certificates. You can access the index via the website of the Irish Genealogical Research Society (**irishancestors.ie/index-of-townlands-1901-87**).

Bear in mind that searches of newspaper databases don't always turn up what you are looking for on the first attempt. It is definitely worth trying different search terms and spellings, filtering and narrowing your search, before resorting to a manual trawl through the pages.

**Searches don't always turn up what you are looking for on the first attempt**

Newspapers can be a joy to explore. On your research journey, you can pick up 19th-century gardening tips, jam recipes and dress patterns, or you might start following the story of a local murder. Finding your ancestors alongside reporting of significant national and international events can put their life into context, placing their birth, marriage or death against the Great Famine (1845–1849), the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Indian Mutiny of 1857 or the 1916 Easter Rising.

### DID YOU KNOW?

A double 's' appeared as 'ff' in early print. So if your ancestor had the surname Classon, you should search 18th- and early 19th-century newspapers for 'Claffon'.

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## Resources

**Take your research further**

**BOOK**

*The History of the Irish Newspaper 1685–1760*
**Robert L Munter**
*Cambridge University Press, 1967*
Munter reveals the origins of the Irish newspaper industry.

**WEBSITES**

FINDMYPAST
w **bit.ly/fmp-ffolliott**
'Irish Newspaper Transcript Archive, Ffolliott Collection 1756–1850' on Findmypast digitises the indispensable newspaper extracts created by Rosemary Ffolliott.

IRISH ANCESTORS
w **johngrenham.com**
Click 'Browse' in the menu bar then choose 'Records' and 'Newspapers' for a detailed introduction to the topic. You can also find a list of titles for each county with links to online collections.

IRISH GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY
w **irishancestors.ie**
You can search a free database of more than 250,000 names mentioned in the society's journal *The Irish Genealogist*, which launched in 1937. Also, society members can access indexes to births, marriages and deaths featured in newspaper notices.

**NICOLA MORRIS**
is a director of Timeline Research (**timeline.ie**) and has appeared on numerous episodes of *WDYTYA?*

# DON'T MISS THE WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? NEWSLETTER

Get essential updates from the world of family history with our **FREE** email newsletter, delivered to your inbox every week

KEEP UPDATED!
Don't miss out on important family history news

## Latest News
Accurate, in-depth coverage of the week's biggest record releases and genealogy news

## Family History Tutorials
Learn how to master basic skills or take your research further with our genealogy tutorials, packed with top tips and expert advice

## Latest Offers
Discover our round-up of new deals and discounts for family historians – helping you save money

## Real Stories
Read extraordinary real-life stories that our readers have uncovered while researching their trees

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SIGN UP TODAY BY VISITING

whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com

SCROLL DOWN TO FIND OUR 'SIGN ME UP' BOX

Coopers make barrels at a cooperative on Newcastle's waterfront, 1954

GETTY IMAGES

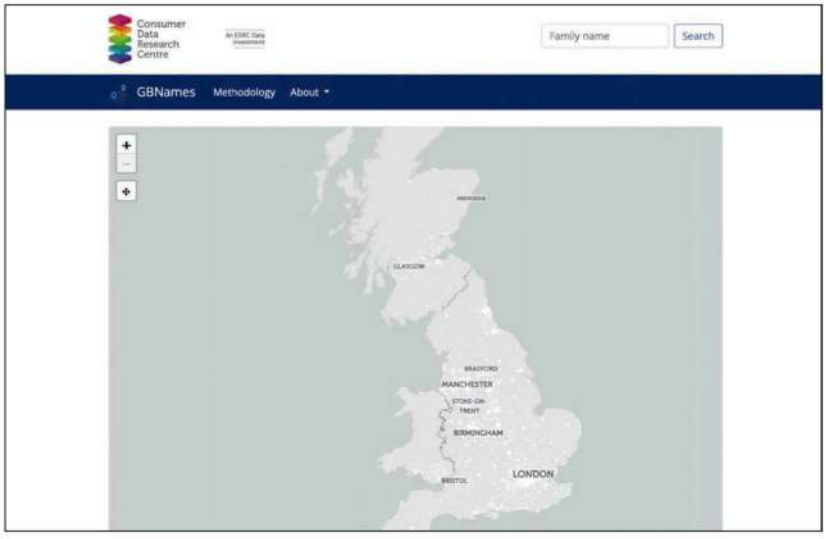
# SURNAMES

**Jonathan Scott** surveys digital dictionaries, surname sources and one-name studies

Wondering about the meaning and derivation of your own surname is often the first step on the path to family history addiction. The etymology and history of family names is a fascinating subject, but it can sometimes be overwhelming and contradictory information is rife.

Surnames generally fit into one of four categories. Locative names are derived from a place. Occupational names are derived from work – examples include Cooper, Smith and Taylor. Nicknames started out as informal monikers, such as Short and Young. And finally there are those that derive from a relationship, such as Williamson, Wilson, McDonald, Jones and O'Brien.

These can be further subdivided into 'patronymic', names adopted from the father, or 'fealtic', where no blood tie existed but the surname was taken out of loyalty or to join a group or clan. In England it was most common to add 'son' to the father's name. In Wales it was the custom to add 's' to the father's name. And in Scotland and Ireland the 'Mac' or 'Mc' prefix meant 'son of'.

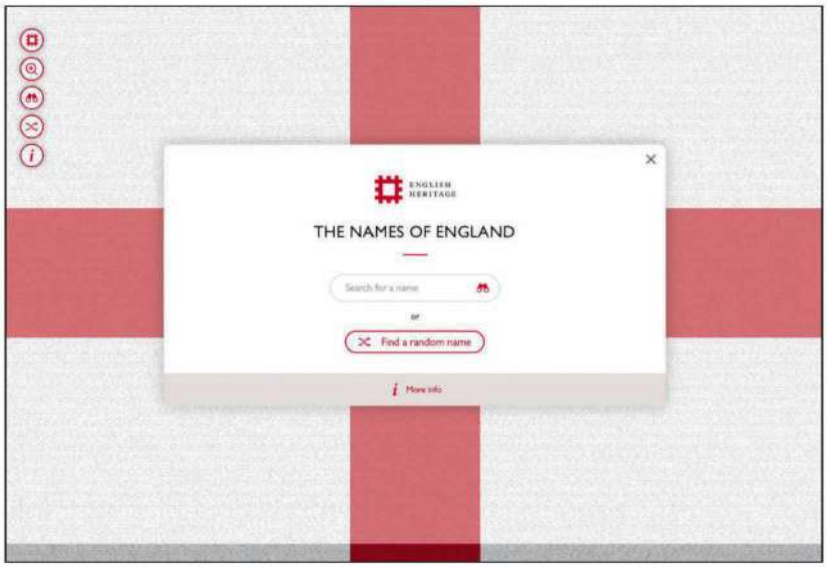



## GBNAMES

W **apps.cdrc.ac.uk/gbnames**

GBNames, run by the Consumer Data Research Centre, is powered by modern and historic databases. Type in a name and you'll be presented with a colour-coded map. The blue contours show the areas in the UK where the "population-weighted density of the surname is highest". Using the slider you can see where the name was found in historical censuses (1851, 1861, 1881, 1901 and 1911), as well as snapshots from 1997, 2006 and 2016. You can scroll down to view associated forenames, top parishes in the past and today, "a rough estimate of the probable ethnicity of the surname" and more. The site has statistics for more than 40,000 unique surnames which accounted for 88 per cent of adults in England, Wales and Scotland in 2016.

# BEST WEBSITES




## NAMES OF ENGLAND

w **namesofengland.english-heritage.org.uk**

This is the free English Heritage version of the website recommended by our expert this month. You're presented with the English flag, which as you zoom in is revealed to be made up of 32,000 names. This gives only partial access to the *Concise Oxford* surname database, and can be rather slow to load, but once you're in it functions well. A test in which I searched for McQuillan led to: "Irish: from Mac Uighilín 'son of Huguelin', a double diminutive of the Norman personal name Hugh." The site also reveals the county in which most namesakes were found, and the total number of adults recorded in the 1881 census.

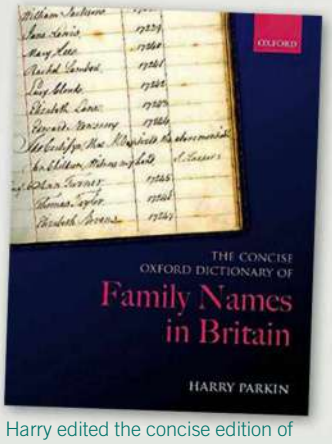
## GUILD OF ONE NAME STUDIES

w **one-name.org**

You won't find information about the meaning of your own name here – the guild exists to encourage surname studies, not provide information about individual surnames. You will, however, find useful advice and guidance about how to conduct a one-name study, some free indexes, alongside some members' only resources. The highlight is the A-to-Z of registered surname studies, often but not always leading to websites run by societies and groups. These too range from vast, global-reach projects, to smaller-scale surveys concentrating on namesakes from within a particular country, town, village or time period.

## EXPERT'S CHOICE

**Dr Harry Parkin**, editor, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain*




Harry edited the concise edition of the key reference work on surnames

Unfortunately there is a lot of misinformation online when it comes to family names. This is partly because many of the accepted histories of surnames were based on outdated research that was carried out a long time ago. Although the same data we have today was theoretically available to historians 75 years ago, it was simply too overwhelming to tackle in the way that we can now. Armed with computers, surname scholars can sort and compare hundreds of millions of digitised records, analyse patterns, and draw conclusions about each surname's origin and history in a way that simply wasn't possible in the past. And that, ultimately, is the very short version of what powers *The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

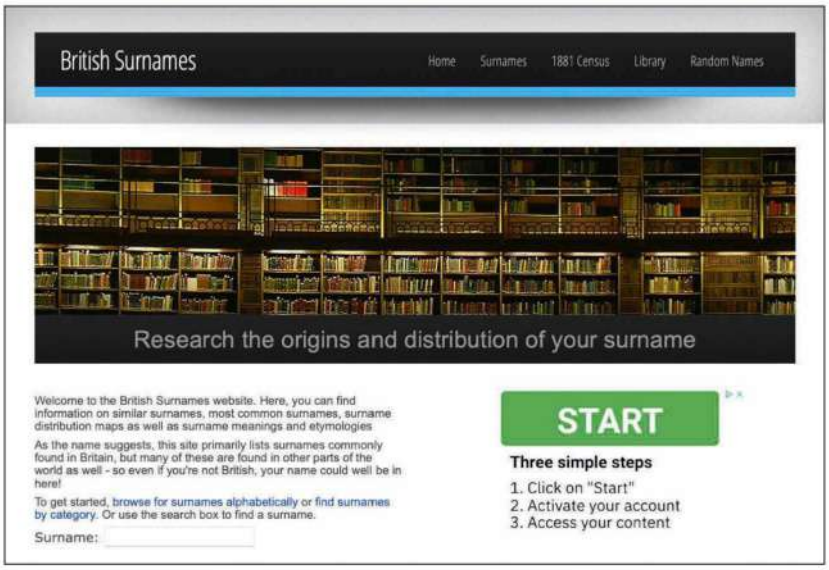
The dictionary, on which I was a research associate, was edited by Patrick Hanks, Richard Coates and Peter McClure. It was the end product of a long-running research project, which covered English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Cornish and immigrant surnames, including every surname with more than 100 bearers today – or more than 20 at the time of the 1881 census. Each entry includes different spellings of the name, an explanation of its origins, how the meaning may have changed, lists of early bearers, and geographical distribution.

There's an online version of the book too, which is available through Oxford Reference (**oxford reference.com**). The site also offers access to the concise edition of the book, which was published in 2021.

Your library might subscribe to the Oxford Reference site

Hundreds of universities and other institutions around the world subscribe to Oxford Reference, in addition to many libraries. You may well find that you can access the website remotely from home by signing in using the number printed on your library card. If you hit problems, there's always the free simplified version at **namesofengland.english-heritage.org.uk**.

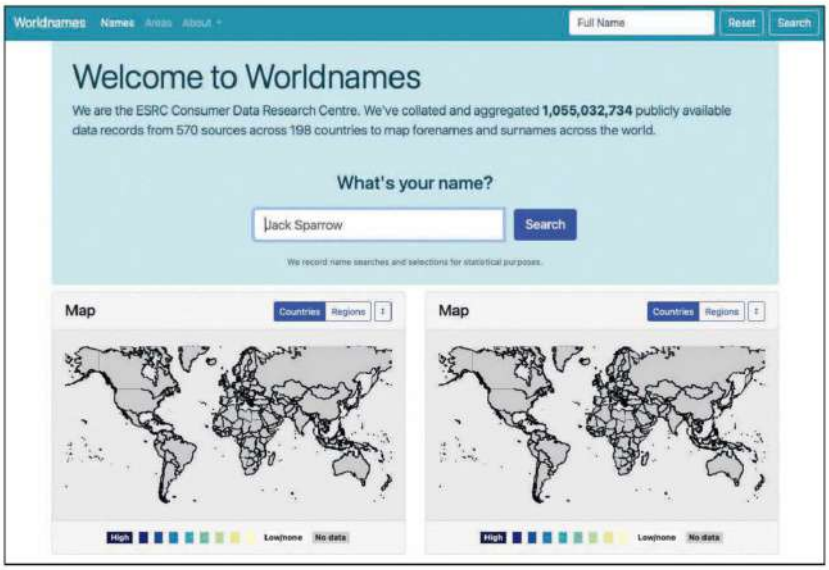
UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER




## BRITISH SURNAMES

w **britishsurnames.co.uk**

This is a helpful if sometimes frustrating website, which is most useful as a way of analysing surnames in the 1881 census. Click '1881 Census' in the menu bar, close the advert if one appears, then choose the county that interests you. On the dedicated county page you will see two lists of names. The one on the left is the most common by head count (often Smith). The column on the right is about comparative frequency – "the percentage of people in this county or town with this surname" – giving you insights into some of the unusual or distinctive names associated with a region. You can then click through and find patterns within individual registration districts.




## WORLDNAMES

w **apps.cdrc.ac.uk/worldnames**

If you enjoyed GBNames, this month's top pick, then its big brother allows you to take a global approach. Worldnames draws on 1,055,032,734 publicly available records from 570 sources in 198 countries. Again, you can use it to study and map forenames and surnames all over the world. Assuming there are enough occurrences of the name to make the database, you will see its global distribution, alongside a table showing the countries where it is most concentrated. Clicking the country will lead to top cities, and then offer statistics such as the most common forenames that are associated with the surname.

# GO FURTHER

**Jonathan also recommends these websites**

## FAMILY NAMES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

w **www.uwe.ac.uk/research/centres-and-groups/bcl/research/family-names**

An overview of the research project that led to the publication of *The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* in 2016.

## INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF ONOMASTIC SCIENCES

w **https://icosweb.net/what-is-onomastics/**

If you want to know more about the study of proper names, this site is for you.

## MEDIEVALISTS.NET

w **medievalists.net**

Many surnames have medieval roots and this site has articles ranging from the multilingual origins of Irish surnames, to unusual girls' names.

## PEOPLE OF MEDIEVAL SCOTLAND

w **poms.ac.uk**

If you have Scottish roots, don't miss this consolidated database of names recorded in documents written between 1093 and 1371.

## PROSOPOGRAPHY OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

w **pase.ac.uk**

Search a database of individuals up to the end of the 11th century taken from chronicles, charters, inscriptions, the Domesday Book and coins.

## SOCIETY FOR NAME STUDIES IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

w **snsbi.org.uk**

Hundreds of articles published in the society's journal *Nomina* can be downloaded for free.

## THE SURNAME SOCIETY

w **surname-society.org**

Although there is little online, the society offers webinars and an annual conference to members.

## THE SOLDIER IN LATER MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

w **medievalsoldier.org**

Explore the names of soldiers serving the English crown between 1369 and 1453.

# ARMY OFFICERS' FAMILIES

**Phil Tomaselli** explains how to use these records as a major release arrives on Ancestry

As an old research guide from The National Archives at Kew says, "For most of its history, the Army has not kept systematic records of its officers" – something that springs from the regimental system that dominated military thinking from the 1660s through to the late Victorian period. At first the regiment was, in practice, the property of its commanding colonel, who not only commanded in battle but was responsible for administration, including the spending of money provided by the Crown for recruitment, promotions and pay. Each regiment kept its own records, in particular details of families. The Horse Guards building in the City of Westminster in London, which became the War Office, gradually assumed many of these responsibilities, but unfortunately the historic records weren't collated in ways that make research by later family historians easy.

Although many officer records have been digitised on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) there's little, so far, on their families and dependents. However, there are now some available in 'UK, Officers' Birth Certificates, Wills and Personal Papers, 1755–1908', a new collection added to Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62614**). The records, held at TNA in series WO 42, were already available to download free from the archive's online catalogue Discovery at **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C14251**. However, although they're collected by first letter of the officer's surname (sometimes again subdivided for ease of download), they're not indexed individually and some time may be needed to locate a particular person.

**Rather than retire fully, some officers went on 'half pay' and acted as a reserve**

For most of the period covered, ordinary soldiers, unless discharged sick or injured, had to serve 21 years to earn a pension, which ceased on their death regardless of whether they had a widow and children. Their family often became dependent on charity, or the workhouse. Officers' commissions within the

GETTY IMAGES

Lieutenant-general Garnet Wolseley directs the Army at the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir in Egypt, 13 September 1882

regiment could be bought and sold, and many relied on the sale of their final commission to support their retirement (this didn't apply to ranks higher than colonel). Rather than retire fully – there were no officer pensions before 1871 – some officers went on 'half pay' and acted as a reserve to be called on again in wartime.

Officers were generally assumed to have money and many did, but impoverished widows (far more in wartime) had to appeal to the Crown for pensions and prove their entitlement. If they remarried then their new husband was supposed to support them, and their pensions ceased – a practice that didn't end until 2000. ▶

# Preprinted Form, 1808

This request for a widow's pension is in The National Archives and is available from its catalogue (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**), Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**)

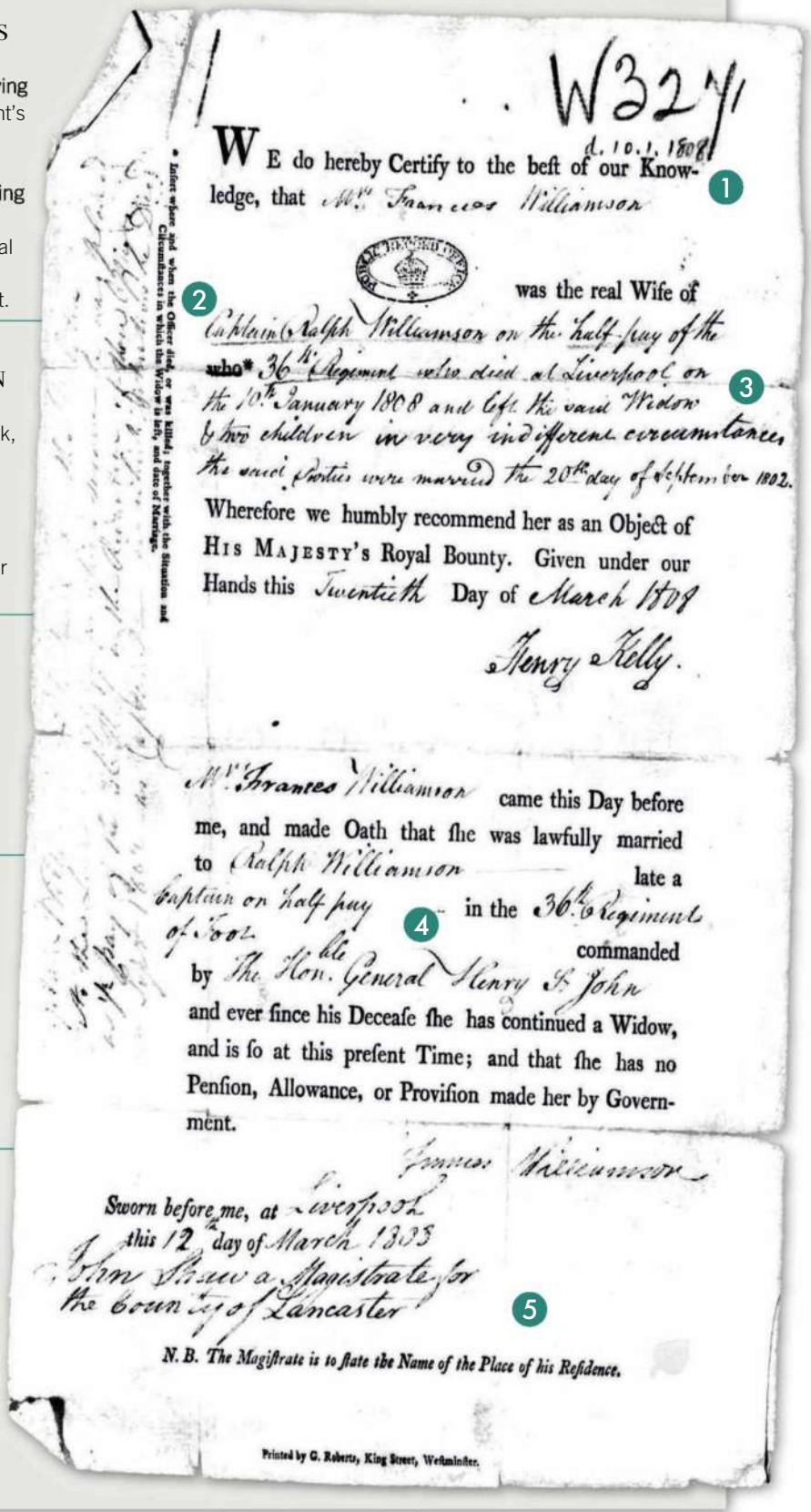
**1 Mrs Frances Williamson**
Without modern copying facilities the document's facts all have to be certified in lieu of duplicates of supporting documents. This section dates the initial claim and gives the name of the applicant.

**2 Ralph Williamson**
The deceased husband's name, rank, regiment, and place and date of death are all given. Note that requests for the widows of more senior officers differ slightly.

**3 Financial Status**
The widow and her two children were in "indifferent circumstances". The date of the marriage is also given.

**4 Oath**
Frances had to swear an oath confirming her widowhood and financial circumstances. The colonel of the regiment is also named here.

**5 John Shaw**
Certification of the swearing of the oath by the magistrate who witnessed it, giving his name and the place that the oath was sworn.



W32½

d. 10. 1. 1808

WE do hereby Certify to the beſt of our Know- 1
ledge, that Mrs. Frances Williamson

* Inſert where and when the Officer died, or was killed; together with the Situation and Circumſtances in which the Widow is left, and date of Marriage.

2 was the real Wife of
Captain Ralph Williamson on the half pay of the
who* 36th Regiment who died at Liverpool on
the 10th January 1808 and left the ſaid Widow 3
& two children in very indifferent circumſtances
the ſaid Parties were married the 20th day of September 1802.
Wherefore we humbly recommend her as an Object of
His Majesty's Royal Bounty. Given under our
Hands this Twentieth Day of March 1808

Henry Kelly.

Mrs. Frances Williamson came this Day before
me, and made Oath that ſhe was lawfully married
to Ralph Williamson late a
Captain on half pay 4 in the 36th Regiment
of Foot. commanded
by The Hon. General Henry St. John
and ever ſince his Deceaſe ſhe has continued a Widow,
and is ſo at this preſent Time; and that ſhe has no
Penſion, Allowance, or Proviſion made her by Govern-
ment.

Frances Williamson

Sworn before me, at Liverpool
this 12th day of March 1808
John Shaw a Magiſtrate for 5
the County of Lancaster

N. B. The Magiſtrate is to ſtate the Name of the Place of his Reſidence.

Printed by G. Roberts, King Street, Weſtminſter.

Colonel Inglis, the Commandant at Lucknow, with his family. Some records of officers' wives and children have gone online

The records in this collection include documents requesting a widow's pension, usually including proof of marriage, details of children and evidence of poverty, normally provided in the form of a handwritten certified copy of the original signed by a priest or magistrate. Also included are a series of wills relating to pension applications.

Ancestry's search facility usually groups papers relating to an individual together by name. Individuals are also usually indexed by their regimental number (eg 36th Regiment or 9th Dragoons). Typing this into the 'Regiment' text field will help to discriminate between common surnames. If you find him (or his wife) simply by date of marriage, for example, then you can use it to check any other records to confirm it's your man.

**Ancestry's search facility usually groups papers relating to an individual together**

## Widows' Pensions

Findmypast has the widows' pension claims requests available in its collection 'British Army Officers' Widows' Pension Forms 1755–1908' (**search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/british-army-officers-widows-pension-forms-1755-1908**), but this does not appear to include officers' wills.

For the annotated record for Frances Williamson, wife of Ralph Williamson (see page 39), there are two documents (not shown) relating to this marriage also viewable. One's a certified statement confirming the 1802 marriage, handwritten by the rector who married them in Hereford and dating from 1808, possibly when Ralph went on half pay. He swears that he has faithfully copied the details from the church register. Marriage certificates as we know them only began in 1837, so certified statements were necessary.

Another linked document headed "Required for Replacing an Officer's Widow on the Pension List" and dated 1820 states that Frances had remarried, on 10 December 1811, to Charles Sawkins Williams (stated in an accompanying letter, then a captain in the Madras Infantry). Perhaps she had married in haste and gone to India with him, and so forgotten to tell the Crown? There's no accompanying documentation saying whether or not the couple were obliged to repay her widow's pension!

### TOP TIP!

Early Commissariat officers, who supplied the Army with food and fuel, were civil servants (see WO 61, WO 62 and PMG/5, not online). They joined the Army in the 1870s.

**PHIL TOMASELLI** is a military historian who contributes to our 'Q&A' section every issue – see page 43

## Resources

**Take your research further**

### ARCHIVE

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

a **Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU**
t 020 8876 3444
w **nationalarchives.gov.uk**

TNA's website includes an extremely useful archived research guide to its holdings of early officer records, including families, although the vast majority have not been digitised and can only be viewed during an in-person visit to Kew: **tinyurl.com/tna-guide-army-officers**. The site also contains Army Lists enabling you to trace an officer's career backwards from death to commission, which you can download as digital microfilm: **tinyurl.com/disc-army-lists**.

### WEBSITE

WAR WIDOWS' STORIES

w **warwidowsstories.org.uk**

This site has a history of army widows' pensions, interviews with recent and historical stories, and descriptions of charities and legal changes that assisted them.

GETTY IMAGES

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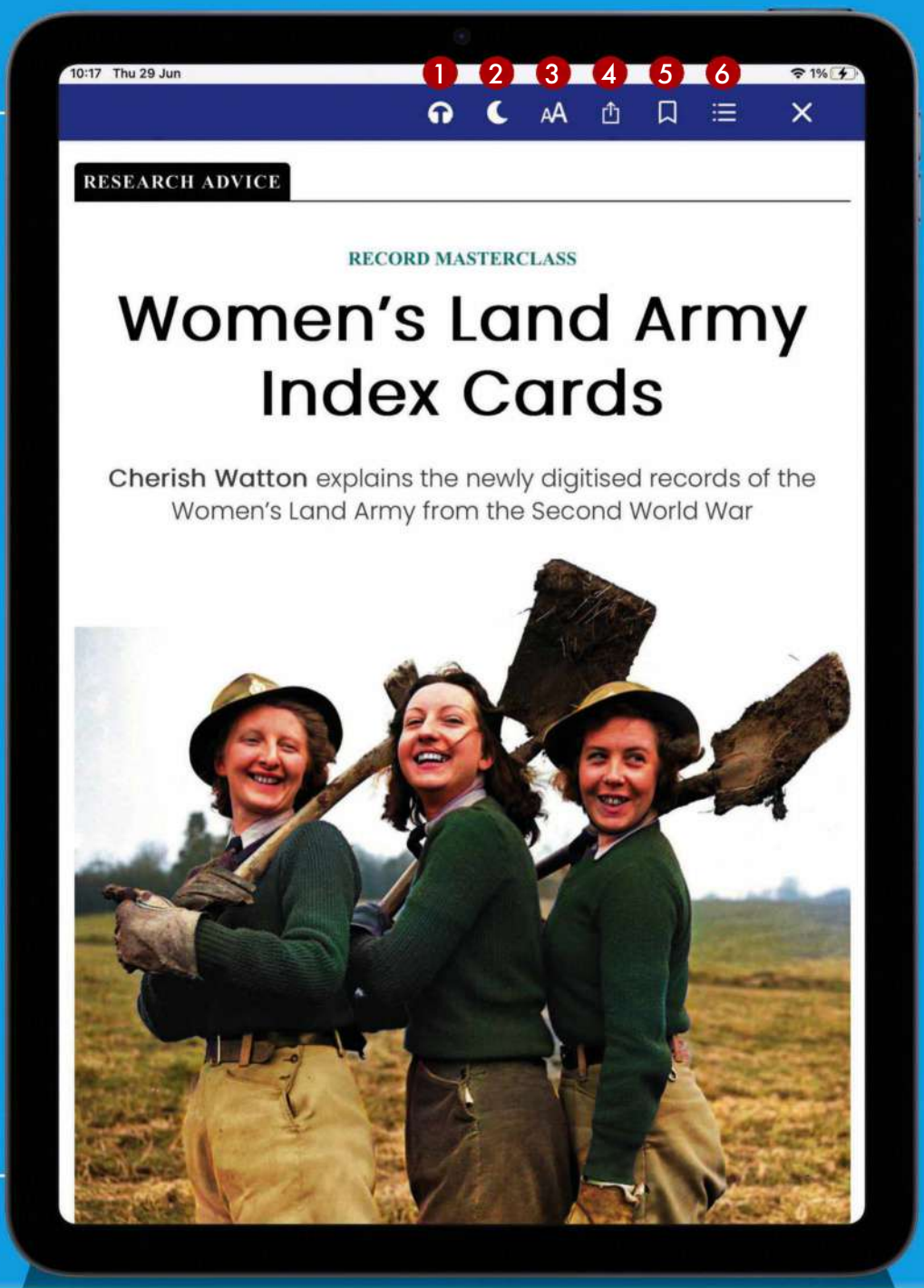


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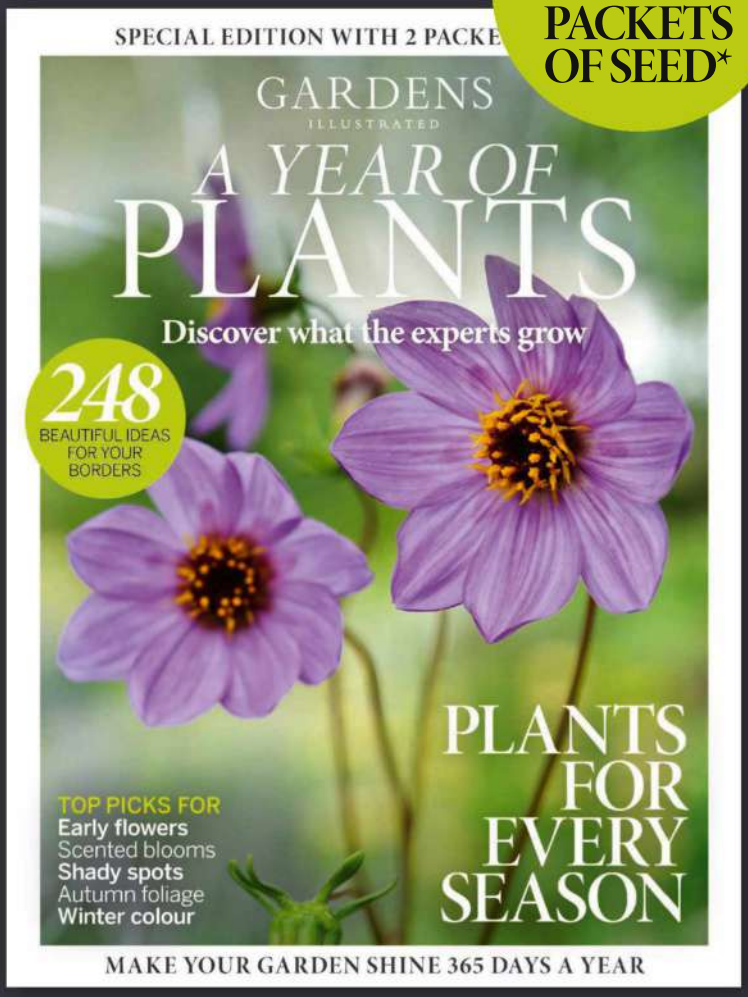


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# Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Dave Annal is a genealogist, author and lecturer

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

Chris Paton is a genealogist and author who blogs at **scottishgenes.blogspot.com**

Jayne Shrimpton is a professional dress historian and portrait specialist

Alan Stewart is a family history writer, and author of *Grow Your Own Family Tree*

Steve Thomas is a genealogist with over 20 years' experience

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author


# Have I got the right parents for my Robert Brown?

**Q** My ancestor Robert Brown, a physician and surgeon, was 50 in the 1851 census and recorded as born in Preston, Lancashire. I think he was the son of Thomas (from Bolton-by-Bowland, Yorkshire) and Ellen (née Holgate), and baptised in Preston on 14 September 1800. One of his sons had the middle name Holgate, and Robert had been apprenticed to a friend of the family near Skipton, Yorkshire. Thomas and Ellen's other children were baptised in Bolton-by-Bowland, so why was Robert born in Preston?

**Hugh Casement**

A Robert's age and birthplace in the 1851 census have led you to a very promising baptismal record, but is the baptism of Robert Brown at Preston on 14 September 1800 the right one? The fact Robert used Ellen's maiden name Holgate as a middle name for one of his sons strengthens the theory.

Or could the Preston Robert be part of another family? A search of the Preston parish registers 10 years either side of 1800 doesn't turn up any potential siblings. It does, however, reveal a record of the burial in 1802 of a 42-year-old Thomas Brown, a strong candidate for Robert's father.

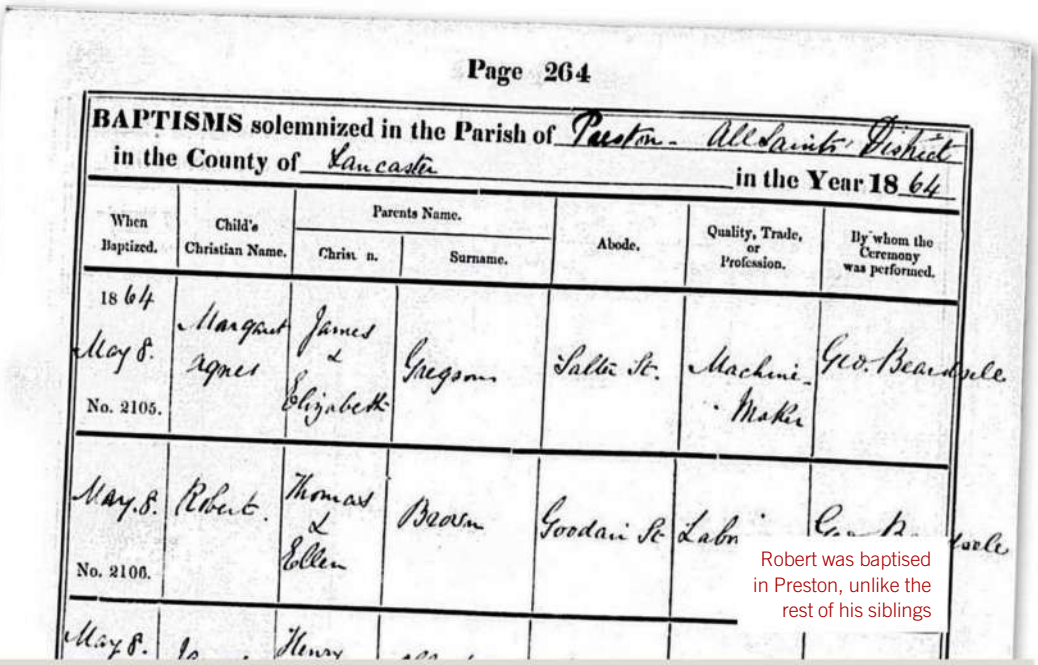
For our theory to hold water, we need evidence that Thomas was no longer in Bolton-by-Bowland by 1800, and searching Land Tax records provides an answer. We can find Thomas in 1798, living in Bolton and occupying a property owned by Lawrence Fearnside, but by 1799 the same property is now owned by Robert Ellis and described as "late Fearnsides".

Lawrence Fearnside married Elizabeth Holgate (a relative of Ellen's?) in 1764, and this is where it gets interesting, because Lawrence and Elizabeth had a son called Lawrence – and the younger Lawrence became a surgeon, in Preston! Of course this isn't proof of a link to your Robert Brown, but it's definitely worth following up.

I suggest that you continue reconstructing the Bolton-by-Bowland family, looking for marriages of each of the children – perhaps Robert was a witness at one of them. You should also search for wills, or anything else that might connect the Bolton family to your Robert in Preston. What happened to Ellen? Assuming the 1802 burial in Preston is that of your Thomas, did she return to the Skipton area with the children?

I think you almost certainly have the right family and that it should be possible to find conclusive proof.

**David Annal**



Page 264

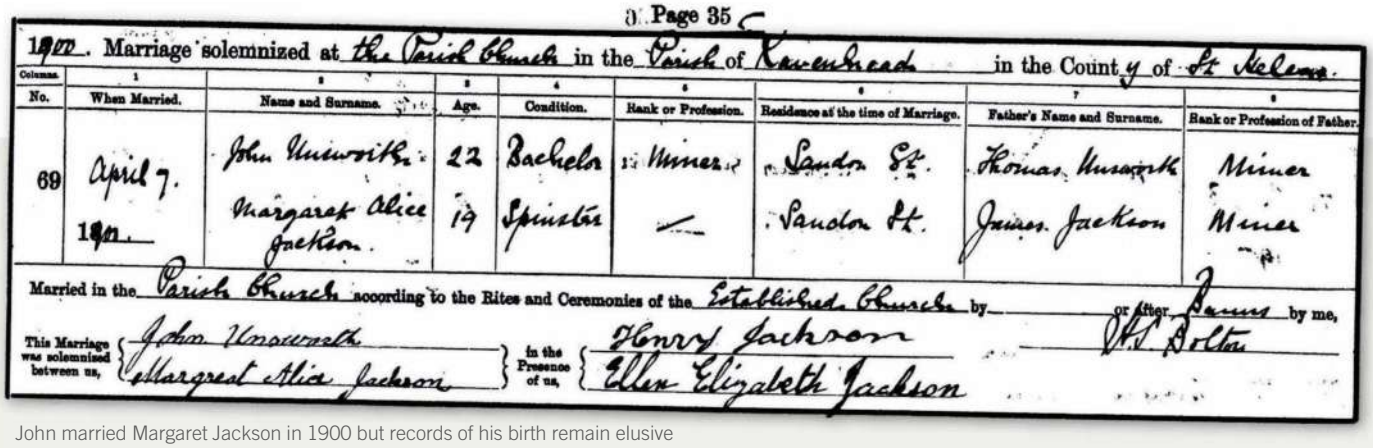
BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of Preston - All Saints' District in the County of Lancaster in the Year 1864

| When Baptized. | Child's Christian Name. | Parents Name. Christian. | Parents Name. Surname. | Abode. | Quality, Trade, or Profession. | By whom the Ceremony was performed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1864 May 8. No. 2105. | Margaret Agnes | James & Elizabeth | Gregson | Salter St. | Machine-Maker | Geo. Beardsale |
| May 8. No. 2106. | Robert. | Thomas & Ellen | Brown | Goodair St. | Labr | C. B. Beardsale |
| May 8. | [illegible] | Henry | [illegible] | [illegible] | [illegible] | [illegible] |

Robert was baptised in Preston, unlike the rest of his siblings

**HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL?** Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.



Page 35

1900. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Knowsley in the County of St Helens.

| Columns. No. | 1 When Married. | 2 Name and Surname. | 3 Age. | 4 Condition. | 5 Rank or Profession. | 6 Residence at the time of Marriage. | 7 Father's Name and Surname. | 8 Rank or Profession of Father. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 69 | April 7. 1900. | John Unsworth. | 22 | Bachelor | Miner | Sandon St. | Thomas Unsworth | Miner |
| | | Margaret Alice Jackson. | 19 | Spinster | — | Sandon St. | James Jackson | Miner |

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by ____ or after Banns by me, J. S. Bolton

This Marriage was solemnized between us, John Unsworth, Margaret Alice Jackson. In the Presence of us, Henry Jackson, Ellen Elizabeth Jackson.

John married Margaret Jackson in 1900 but records of his birth remain elusive

# How do I find my wife's ancestor's date of birth?

**Q** My wife's grandfather was John Unsworth, a private in the 7th Battalion King's Shropshire Light Infantry, formerly 4640 Royal Field Artillery.

He was born in Daubhill, Lancashire, in 1879; enlisted in St Helens; and died in France. The 1881 census suggests Ellen Unsworth was his mother, and that he had a brother Valentine (born 7 April 1880).

I've made exhaustive searches of subscription websites, but can't find John's date of birth.

**John Muir**

**A** The best place to find a soldier's birthdate is on their enlistment document, which usually includes their service record. But a check of Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) suggests none survives.

I consulted other collections. Findmypast's 'Royal Artillery Attestations 1883–1942' has no relevant man, while Ancestry's 'UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929' gives no birthdate. The series PIN 26, the surviving 2 per cent of First World War pension files, are indexed on The National Archives' site at **tinyurl.com/tna-pin26**, but there's no John. His Pension Card (via Ancestry) gives birthdates only for his family. It does give an address: 8 Booth Street, St Helens. This matches the 1911 address for John Unsworth and wife Margaret, confirming it's him.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's site (**www.cwgc.org**) records John as 38 when he died on 17 June 1917, but if his brother was born on 7 April 1880, I think it unlikely John was born before June 1879 and probably at least three months before that.

In the 1911 census (on 2 April), John was 33. He married on 7 April 1900, aged 22. This takes him back to 1878 and suggests early April. If we give a year's leeway, we're looking at early April 1879, matching the 1881 census. I obtained the birth certificate for John Unsworth born in the June Quarter of 1879 in Bolton, but the mother was Martha. You could also look into June 1878.

Findmypast has a tantalising militia enlistment document for collier John Unsworth, from Newton, near St Helens, who enlisted in the South Lancashire Militia in 1899 and bought himself out after 76 days.

**Phil Tomaselli**

# Who was Lucy Garlick's seducer?

**Q** In 1832, newspapers across Britain reported on a 'criminal conversation' case at the Taunton Assizes. Thomas Garlick of Wickwar, Gloucestershire, was suing a Dr West for having seduced – and run away with – his wife, Lucy Skey Garlick (born 1820), the daughter of Thomas Skey, surgeon.

Thomas Garlick won the case and was awarded substantial damages, but what happened to Lucy and who was Dr West?

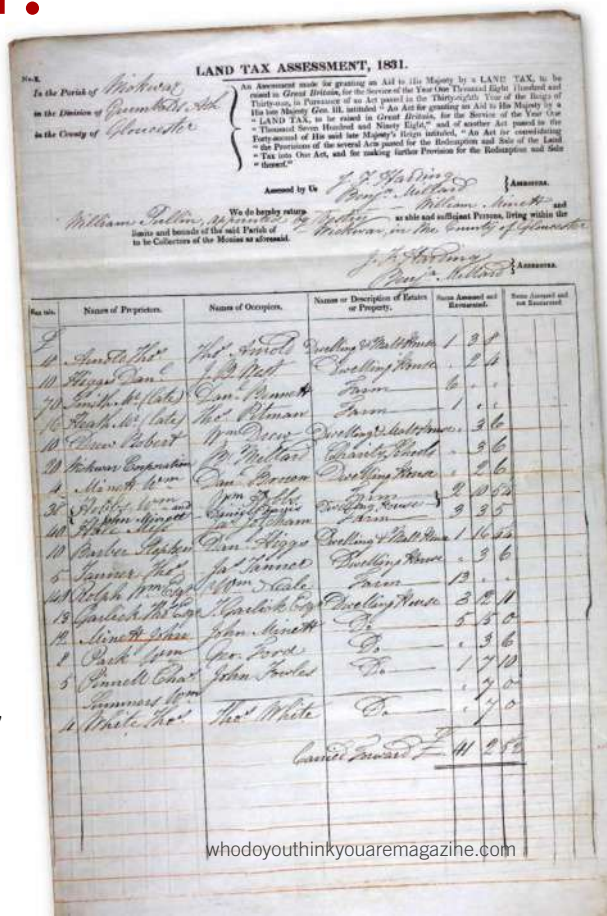
**Toni Glasson**

**A** No forename was given for Dr West in newspaper reports from 1832, which is before the publication of medical directories in the 1840s. But the reports do contain evidence given by individuals living between the houses occupied by Dr West and Thomas and Lucy Garlick suggesting that they lived near each other in Wickwar. Land Tax records list Thomas Garlick in Wickwar in 1830 and 1831. In the same hamlet, 10 houses away is JB West, who is renting a dwelling house (see image, *right*).

Entry into the medical profession was by apprenticeship (perhaps he had been apprenticed to Lucy's father) or through one of the five medical schools that existed at the time. Gloucester Archives has some apprenticeship records, and graduate lists of medical schools can be found online. Once you have established what the initials stand for, you will be better able to trace him forward. According to witnesses, the couple had set up home in Taunton before the trial. There is no guarantee that they returned there, but it may represent a starting point.

Lucy Garlick was mentioned in a will made by her uncle, William Ody, in February 1849. She seems to be absent from the 1841 census under Garlick or West. There is a Lucy Garlick in the collection 'England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791–1892' on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) with a burial in St Luke's, Finsbury, aged 49 years in 1850, but this could well be a red herring.

**Steve Thomas**



LAND TAX ASSESSMENT, 1831.

## Picture Analysis

# Who are the couple in this copy photo?

**Q** Can you date this image? It isn't an original photo, and has a faded notation "Dimond and Hart Limited" in the bottom-right corner. It's said to be my great great grandparents, William Ramsbottom (born 1851) and Sarah Matthewman (born 1858), who married in Scarborough in 1883. Their eldest child, Madge, my great grandmother, married in Scarborough in 1904.
**Catherine Hauraki**

**A** This is definitely a copy photograph, probably an enlarged version of the original. Photographic copies/enlargements were commonly colour-retouched by hand, to restore any pictorial detail lost in the process, and to render the image more attractive and lifelike, creating a substantial portrait for display at home. Most professional photographers undertook enlarging and retouching, and Dimond and Hart evidently specialised in such work. The blog Early New Zealand Photographers (**canterburyphotography.blogspot.com/2014/03/dimond-and-hart.html**) suggests that the partnership was established c1893 and although Joseph Dimond and Stephen Hart died in 1902 and 1909 respectively, the firm's name continued until at least the 1930s.

We don't know exactly when this copy picture was created, but the smart appearance of your ancestors provides an accurate timeframe for the original photograph. The lady's high-necked blouse, tailored suit and boater hat confirm a year between the mid-1890s and early 1900s; the man's appearance is also typical of the turn of the 19th/20th centuries. The date is clearly too late to represent William and Sarah's marriage in 1883, but might, for instance, commemorate their 15-year or 20-year anniversary. Alternatively, it could record the Scarborough wedding of Madge in 1904.
**Jayne Shrimpton**

### 1 DATE
The date suggests two possible couples, and identifying which means estimating their ages. Madge and Thomas seem most likely, their original wedding photo later copied.

### 2 MAN'S HAT
The tall shape of the stiff bowler hat that the man is wearing offers a key dating clue: this style was fashionable between the late 1880s and early 1900s.

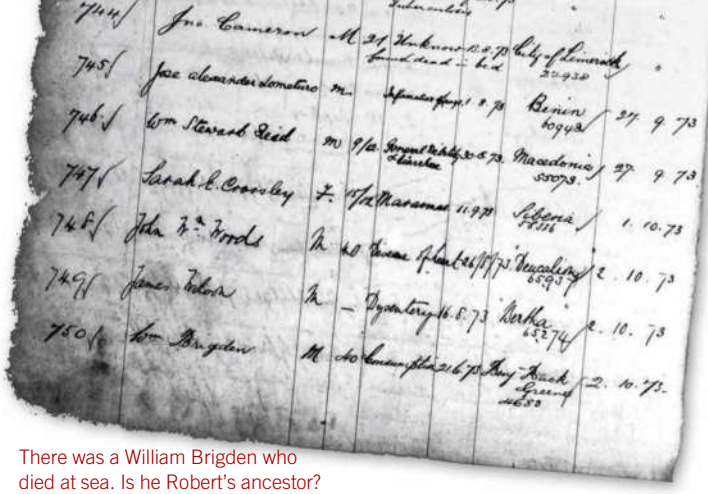
### 3 SHIRT COLLAR
His starched winged shirt collar was a formal style favoured mainly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### 4 WOMAN'S HAT
Straw boater hats were summer headwear fashionable with Victorian and Edwardian men, but women adopted the mode briefly between the mid-to-late 1890s and the early 1900s.

### 5 SLEEVES
The puffed sleeves of the lady's tailored jacket, styled to accommodate the blouse underneath, indicate a date between the mid-1890s and early 1900s.

### 6 OCCASION
When a couple commissioned a special studio photograph, the wife clearly displaying her wedding ring (as here), the occasion was usually marriage or a milestone wedding anniversary.

# What happened to William and Ann Brigden?



There was a William Brigden who died at sea. Is he Robert's ancestor?

**Q** My great great grandfather William Brigden was baptised as William Brigden Gardener in 1826 in the parish of Kemsing in Kent. He married Ann Crowson in 1851 in Ightham nearby. In 1871 they were in Stratford, Essex, with children Lottie, Catherine and Thomas. An older son William was married by then, and another daughter Harriett had died. Thomas's 1882 marriage certificate shows William as a deceased engine man. Catherine's marriage certificate in 1878 doesn't show her father as deceased.

What happened to William and Ann?

**Robert Brigden**

**A** I, too, could find no sign of William nor Ann Brigden (or surname variants) in the 1881 census. I also searched the census on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) with initials only; many people in asylums, prisons etc didn't have their full names recorded for privacy reasons. There are entries for a "W B" and "A B", but no place of birth is given.

Also, William and Ann aren't mentioned in emigration records, or online newspapers.

If they both died (between 1878 and 1881), then they may well have been buried in the same graves as Harriett or Lottie (Ann Elizabeth), who had both died before these dates. I tried BillionGraves (**billiongraves.com**, also searchable on Findmypast), Deceased Online (**deceasedonline.com**), Find a Grave (**findagrave.com**) and the Gravestone Photographic Resource (**gravestonephotos.com**), and the collection 'London, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813–2003' on Ancestry.

Deceased Online has the burial of a William Brigden on 17 September 1880 in Southwark, but no corresponding civil registration death record. An Ann Brigden was buried in Lambeth on 16 January 1878, which is where an Eliza Brigden had been buried on 25 May 1875 (is this Ann Elizabeth/Lottie?). Another possibility is Findmypast's 'Registers of Deaths of Passengers at Sea, 1854–1890', which shows that a William Brigden, a passenger on board the ship *Benjamin Buck Greene*, died of consumption on 21 June 1873.

Sometimes births, marriages and deaths are recorded locally, but not transferred to the General Register Office. Try Newham Register Officer, which holds the records for Stratford (**tinyurl.com/newham-ro**).

**Alan Stewart**

**TOP TIP** **If you're looking for someone who may have just been recorded by initials in an asylum or prison (commonest in 1891), you can narrow the results by adding occupation to your search parameters on TheGenealogist (thegenealogist.co.uk).**

# Was Susannah Priestly a widow?

Susannah referred to herself as a widow on the 1841 census living with her son

**Q** My late mother-in-law's research uncovered a Susannah Priestley, baptised at St Peter's, Leeds, on 9 July 1809, her father John Priestley (1787–1820). In 1831 she had an illegitimate son, John. In the 1851 Leeds census she was at 16 Randersons Yard, unmarried, with John; in 1861 John had left and married; in 1871, now a widow, a 28-year-old son, Joseph, is living with her. Susannah died in 1879 – the witness was JL Tate. Why was she shown as a widow in 1871? Who was Joseph? Was John's father James Priestly, a miner, as stated on his marriage certificate?

**Gwen Birch**

**A** Baptisms at St Peter's can be found on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), and confirm that Susannah was unmarried. The registers show that Susanna(h) Priestley, a spinster, living at Bank, had two sons baptised: John on 12 July 1830 and Joseph Gelder, born on 14 December 1836 and baptised on 29 January 1837. In naming her younger son Joseph Gelder, Susannah may have provided a clue to the surname of his father. However, bastardy records for West Yorkshire on Ancestry do not mention her.

The three census entries relate to the same person, even though Susannah was recorded as a widow in 1871 and unmarried in 1851/1861. She is also shown as a widow in 1841, when she was recorded as Susan *Preistley*, living at Towlard's Court, Leeds, with her son, Joseph. It was not uncommon for a woman with illegitimate children to call herself a widow for the sake of respectability. Similarly, when an illegitimate person married, the illegitimacy was often hidden by naming a fictitious father.

I researched the nephew who registered the death, to try to confirm you have the correct death certificate. By checking the address he gave against the previous census, I learnt he was John Lister Tate, the son of William and Ann (née Lister) Tate. I found no connection between him and Susannah, but suggest researching the Tate family.

**Katherine Cobb**

# Big Question

## Was William Duffus my illegitimate great grandfather's father?

Q My great grandfather, James Duffus, was born in about 1837. He was a carpenter, and family lore has it that his father was provost of the burgh of Cullen, Banffshire.

The 1851 census shows James as a scholar in Deskford Street, Cullen, the nephew of John Duffus, house carpenter, and Christina his wife. In 1841, James, aged four, is at Deskford Street with the same couple.

I cannot find a birth record for him, but an illegitimate child named James was born to Elizabeth Davidson in Cullen, on 14 July 1836, and baptised on 5 March 1837, but I cannot connect her to the Duffus family. However, in Upper Castle Street, Cullen, there was a William Duffus, house carpenter, in both the 1841 and 1851 censuses. This William Duffus did become provost. Was he James' father?
**Robin M White**

**ROBIN M WHITE** contacted us for help solving a paternity mystery

A To confirm whether the illegitimate child born in 1836 was your James Duffus, the first thing I did was to check the Cullen Kirk Session records, which are on ScotlandsPeople (**scotlandspeople.gov.uk**). These show that an Elizabeth Davidson, a resident of the parish, was called before the session on 5 June 1836. She accused William Grant of being the father – not William Duffus – effectively ruling her out. This appears to be the case that you have already found evidence of, with Elizabeth giving birth in the midst of the investigation on 14 July 1836.

However, your James was believed from most records to have been born in 1837, a year later, so I continued to work through the session minutes for Cullen, and soon came across a much more promising record. Coincidentally, this also involved a pregnant woman called Elizabeth Davidson; however, in this case she was a "native of Portsoy, and presently residing there". She appeared before the Cullen Kirk Session on 26 February 1837, and "confessed herself with child in fornication", naming William Duffus, "an unmarried man residing in Cullen", as the father of her child. She was addressed by the moderator of the church and instructed to reappear at the kirk the following Sunday (CH2/1113/8 page 47).

There is then a gap of several months before the case is again mentioned on 1 July 1837, where it is noted that William Duffus, a "wright in Cullen", had "admitted guilt" to the charge of fornication with Elizabeth Davidson. He then "professed penitence and paid down the sum of one guinea as his penalty", at which point he was admonished and then absolved (CH2/1113/8 page 53).

This would seem to be the same William Duffus as you found in the 1841 and 1851 censuses, if no other candidates with that occupation and name can be found, and it does circumstantially fit in with his later marriage to Margaret Simpson in 1840. Being pregnant in February 1837, Elizabeth must have given birth to James in that year, but the only record for a James Davidson born to an Elizabeth is that which you have already found, for the James born on 14 July 1836, ruling this entry out.

It is possible that Elizabeth may have given birth elsewhere beyond the parish, and may have married or died after the birth, with James given to William's brother John to raise.

It would be worth exploring the fate of any Elizabeth Davidsons of childbearing age in the area to see if any died or married shortly after this and had children. An autosomal DNA test could be employed to seek possible genetic connections to such descendants, but also to look for connections between yourself and other descendants of William Duffus.
**Chris Paton**

Kirk records show William Duffus confessing to being the father

Elizabeth named William Duffus as the father of her unborn child

# Which regiment was John in?

**Q** Can you identify the regiment my great great uncle, John MacTavish Henry (born 1870), served with? This is the only picture I have of him.
**Lorraine Janes**

**A** This is a sketch, post-1902, of an Australian who'd fought in the Second Boer War (1899–1902) and, probably, in Matabeleland in 1893. I think that it was likely drawn from a poor-quality photo.

The uniform is standard British/Commonwealth/Colonial style for the late 19th century, so the only real clues are the medals, indicating service in the Second Boer War. A search of the AngloBoerWar website (**angloboerwar.com**) produced a John McLavish (sic) Henry, lance-corporal, number 36789, in the Prince of Wales' Light Horse (PWLH) volunteer cavalry regiment.

His PWLH enrolment form, at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, in WO 126/102, confirms that he was a lance-corporal, enlisted in the regiment on 5 July 1901 and was discharged on 15 January 1902, on disbandment. TNA's document WO 127/16, PWLH, nominal rolls, shows that he'd originally served with the 1st New South Wales Contingent, 3rd Imperial Bushmen. He'd been serving in the New South Wales Police in 1898; did he resign or desert to go to South Africa? I can find no record of him in the National Archives of Australia's Second Boer War soldiers' section.

AngloBoerWar gives Trooper John Henry serving with Commandant Raaff's column in Matabeleland, 1893. The only record I can find online is on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) in medal roll WO 100/77 saying he fought in the operation at Singuesi. If this is him, he was probably in South Africa in 1893, because recruitment was local.
**Phil Tomaselli**

## 1 COLLAR BADGE

I cannot identify the collar badge depicting a kangaroo (wallaby?), although it is clearly Australian. If any readers can assist, please get in touch with the magazine.

## 2 KING'S SOUTH AFRICA MEDAL

The King's South Africa Medal was issued for service in 1901–1902. The white central stripe and its position next to the QSA Medal confirm its identification.

## 3 BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA COMPANY MEDAL

Campaign medals are worn with the newest closest to the buttons and the oldest closest to the shoulder (or in a row beneath). The only medal with these stripes pre-Second Boer War was awarded by the BSAC for service in what became Rhodesia. Searching the AngloBoerWar site produces only one John Henry entitled to this medal, in 1893.

## 4 QUEEN'S SOUTH AFRICA MEDAL

This was awarded to all soldiers (and some civilians) serving in the Second Boer War. The sketch incorrectly suggests a dark central stripe with lighter surround, probably because of the poor quality of the original photo.

## 5 CHAIN

The chain suggests he carried a whistle in his pocket and had some authority.

# MERCHANDISE

## BACK ISSUES
If you've missed an issue, here's a chance to complete your collection – and find out how to subscribe on page 22

**Issue 210**
**NOVEMBER 2023**
- Female lines
- Guilds & freemen
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**Issue 211**
**DECEMBER 2023**
- DNA testing
- Tracing musicians
- Pubs & publicans
- Staffordshire kin

**Issue 212**
**CHRISTMAS 2023**
- 12 projects
- Old newspapers
- WW2 POWs
- London kin

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**JANUARY 2024**
- 50 websites
- Metropolitan Police
- Romany roots
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- Workhouses
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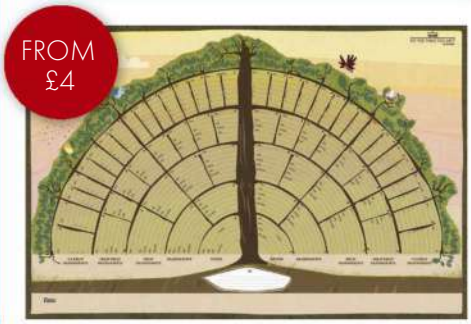


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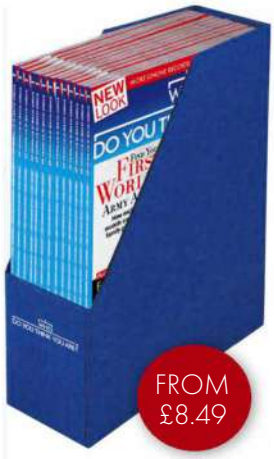


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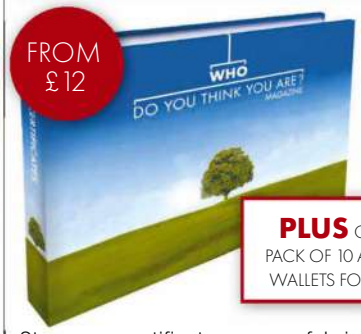


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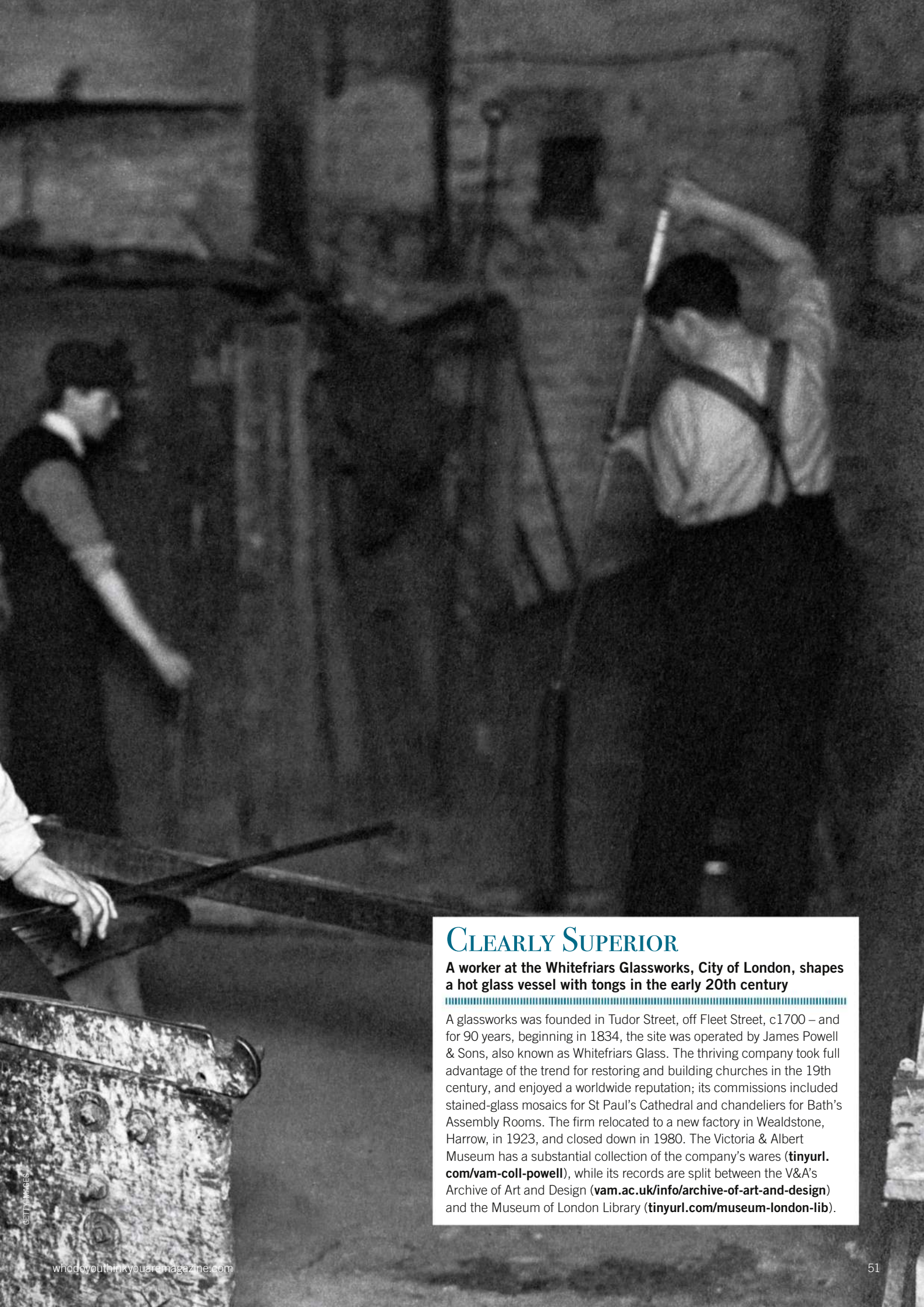
# LOCAL INDUSTRY

Celebrating our ancestors' work in key trades



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## Clearly Superior

**A worker at the Whitefriars Glassworks, City of London, shapes a hot glass vessel with tongs in the early 20th century**

A glassworks was founded in Tudor Street, off Fleet Street, c1700 – and for 90 years, beginning in 1834, the site was operated by James Powell & Sons, also known as Whitefriars Glass. The thriving company took full advantage of the trend for restoring and building churches in the 19th century, and enjoyed a worldwide reputation; its commissions included stained-glass mosaics for St Paul's Cathedral and chandeliers for Bath's Assembly Rooms. The firm relocated to a new factory in Wealdstone, Harrow, in 1923, and closed down in 1980. The Victoria & Albert Museum has a substantial collection of the company's wares (**tinyurl.com/vam-coll-powell**), while its records are split between the V&A's Archive of Art and Design (**vam.ac.uk/info/archive-of-art-and-design**) and the Museum of London Library (**tinyurl.com/museum-london-lib**).

# Easily create a stylish family history chart

**Nick Peers** reveals how to build your family tree using Treemily's online tools

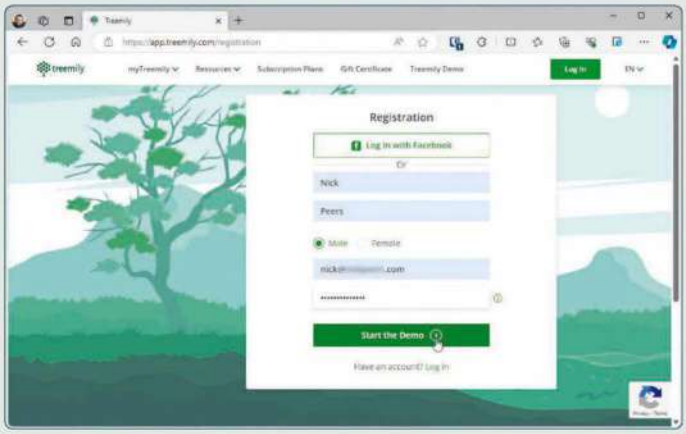
Looking for a new way to showcase your family history online? Treemily (**treemily.com**) is a dedicated tree-building service with a focus on creating eye-catching prints from your family tree. Everything is accessible through your web browser, and you can easily build your tree from scratch following our step-by-step guide.

After you've generated your chart, click 'Order Print' where you can see a preview, plus choose type (poster, framed or digital) and size. Digital and posters are priced directly, but framed prints require you to make further choices – such as frame material and paper type – before the final cost is shown.

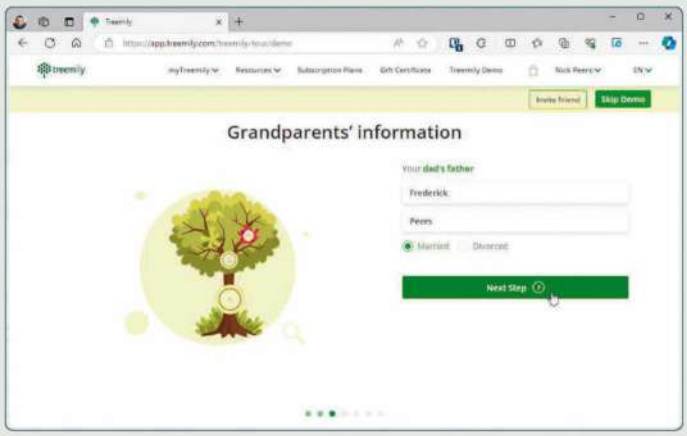
In addition to charging for prints, Treemily also adopts a two-tier subscription system for access to the site. The free 'Basic' tier that we feature here comes with 200MB of online storage for your photos, plus all of the basic customisations you need to create eye-catching trees. If you want even greater choice and flexibility over the look of your charts, a 'Premium' subscription costs $129.99 per year ($149.99 for two years), and offers 2GB storage and a 10 per cent discount on all orders. Visit **treemily.com/plans** to compare the two and sign up if you decide the extra cost is worth it.

**TOP TIP!**

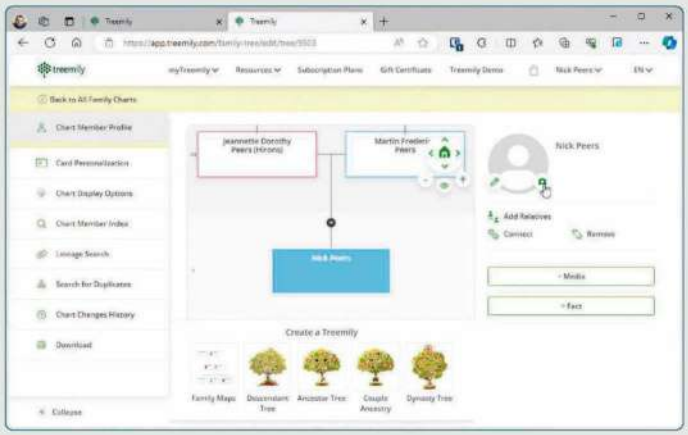
Treemily claims to support GEDCOM imports, but only up to 1MB in size. However, the site seems very fussy – we failed to find a GEDCOM file it would accept.




**1 Create Your Account** Head over to **treemily.com** and click 'Register' to sign up for your free account. You can log in with your Facebook account or provide your name, gender, email address and a suitably strong password. Once done, click 'Start the Demo' and run through a quick introductory guide.

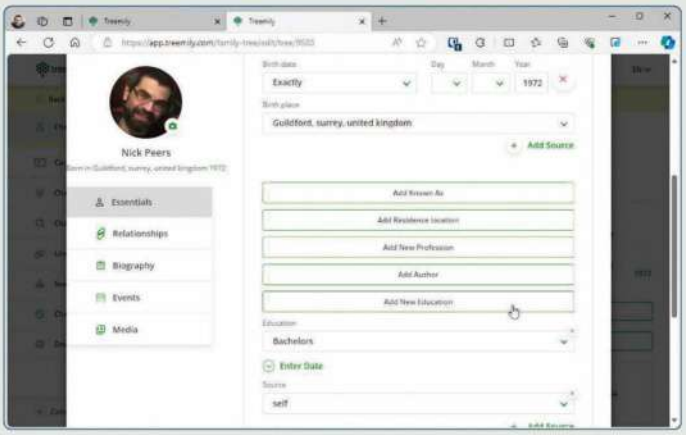



**2 Choose The Type Of Tree** Treemily allows you to create both descendant and ancestor trees, and the demo provides you with a helping hand. It'll prompt you to enter the names of your parents and grandparents, then offer to show a preview and invite you to order a print. Ignore this – instead, click 'Add Members'.

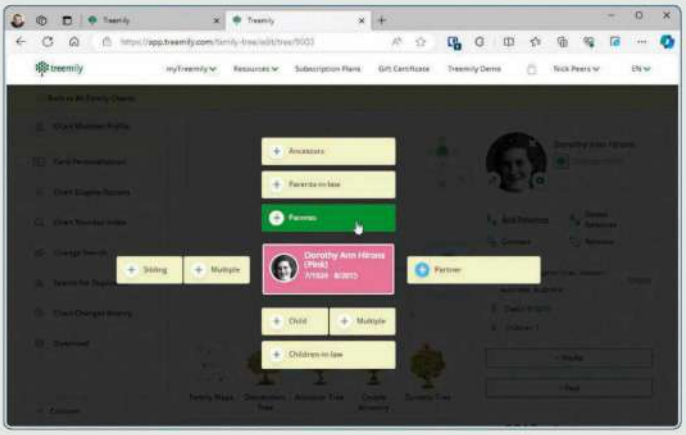



**3 View Your Profile** You'll be taken to the main page of your family tree. Your profile is displayed on the right – you'll see controls for adding a headshot (avatar) and other photographs, plus basic facts. You should begin by uploading your avatar, so click the small green icon of a camera.

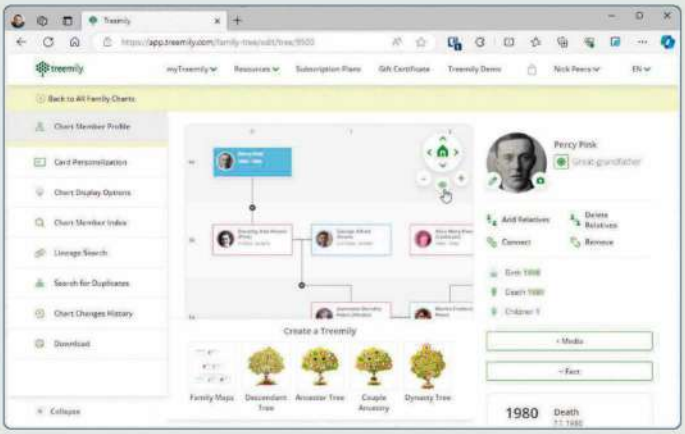
**4 Upload Your Photo** Either drag a photograph into the space provided or click 'Browse' to select it manually. Once uploaded, use the controls beneath the photo to crop, flip or move. Click the tick button to apply a change. Then either click 'Continue Editing' to perform more edits, or 'OK' to set the photo.



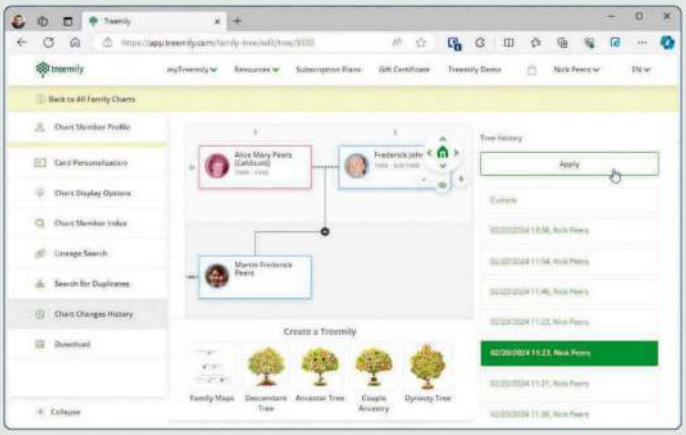
**5 Add Personal Information** Click the pencil icon next to your photograph to fill in additional details, including date and place of birth. Explore the other sections to see what else can be recorded – not just about you, but other people in your tree too. Once you've added everything, click 'Save'.



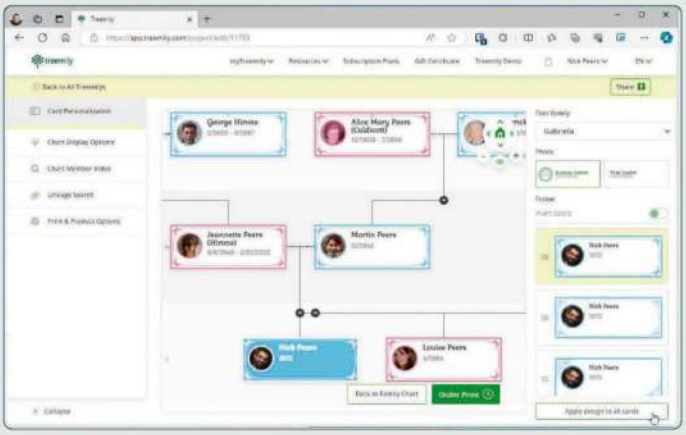
**6 Build Out Your Tree** Once you've fleshed out your parents and grandparents, select a close relation to the person you wish to add, then click 'Add Relatives' under their name. You'll see options for adding different types of relations. Select one and follow the wizards, all designed to speed up data entry.



**7 Navigate Your Tree** You can navigate your tree in the main window – you'll see that it looks like any other ancestor- or descendant-based tree. Click and drag to move around, using the scroll wheel on your mouse to zoom in and out. You can also move around by clicking the compass arrows in the top right of the window.

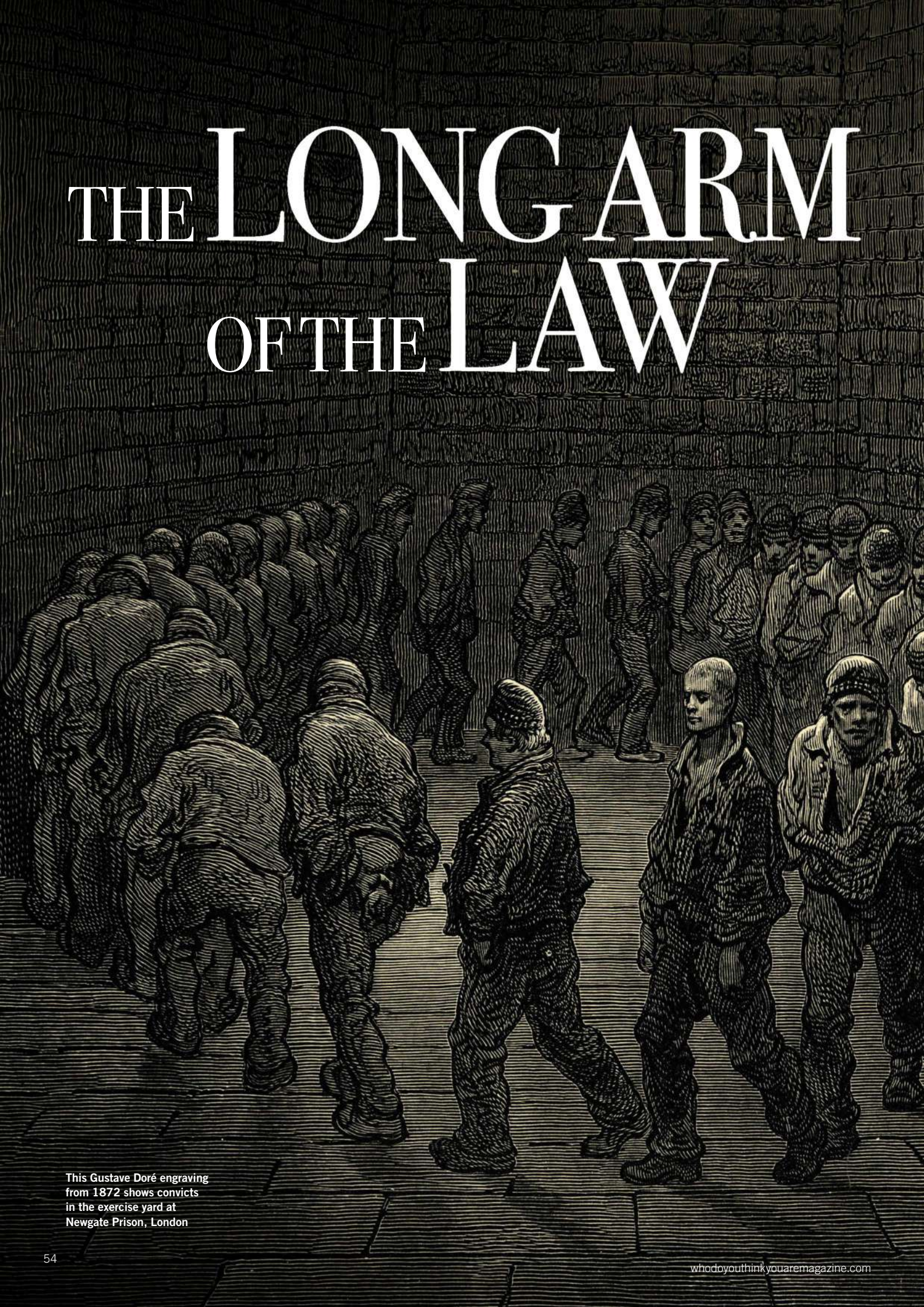


**8 Customise Your Tree** Use the options on the left to access other views – such as an index of people – as well as customise the tree using the 'Card Personalization' and 'Chart Display Options' tabs. You can even revert to a previous version with the 'Chart Changes History' tab – select a version to preview it, then click 'Apply'.

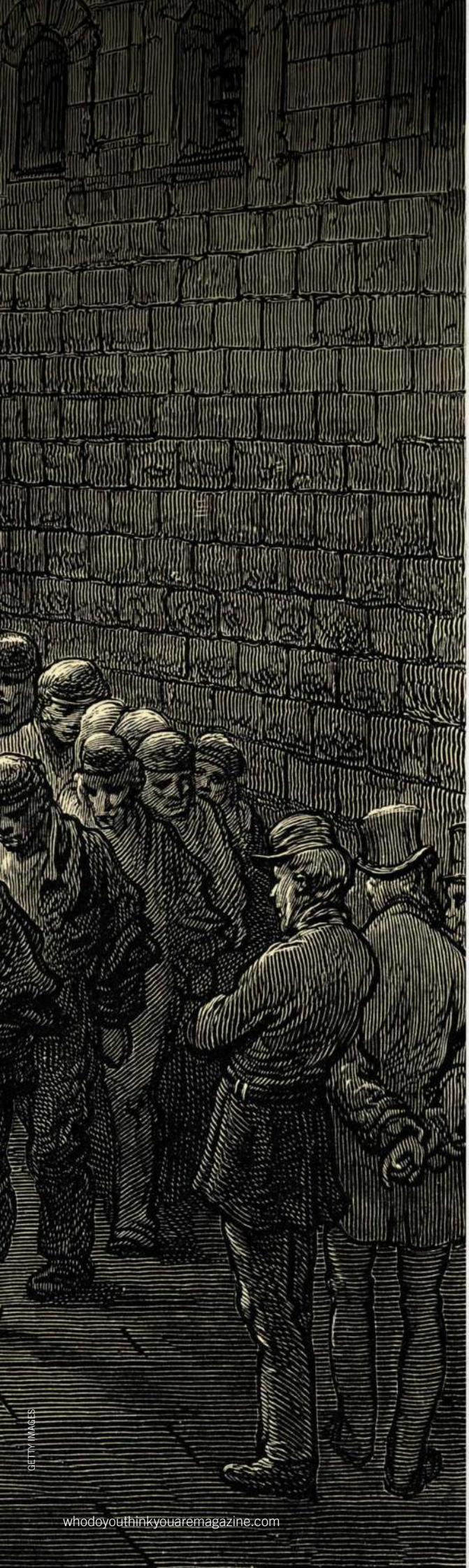


**9 Print Your Tree** Once you're ready, select your chart type from the 'Create a Treemily' list, then follow the prompts. Family Maps can be coloured as required; other charts require you to provide a name, then choose your design (such as City Grid Tree or Summertime). Make your final tweaks and then click 'Order Print'.

# THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW



This Gustave Doré engraving from 1872 shows convicts in the exercise yard at Newgate Prison, London



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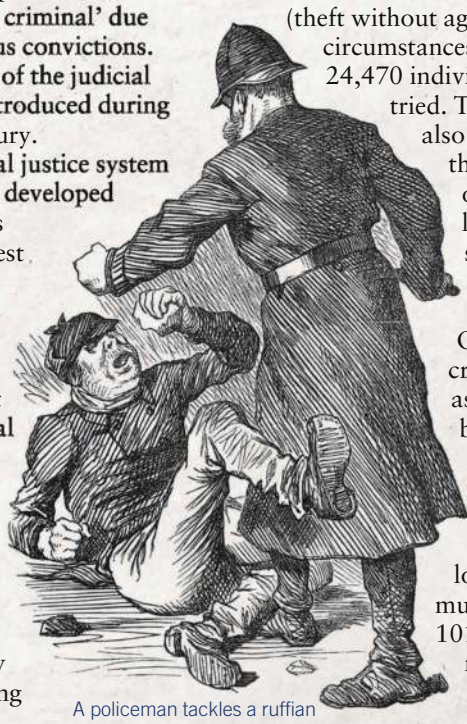
## **Angela Buckley** investigates how crime and punishment changed in the Victorian era

On 21 October 1901, Rose Stapleton was charged with being drunk and disorderly. According to the *London Weekly Dispatch*, the prisoner was 28 years old, "decently dressed and powerfully built. On being ushered into the dock of Southwark Police Court, she quipped, 'All right, I know my way', adding, 'Poor Rosa, always drunk!' " She was convicted and fined 40s. Stapleton was classified as a 'habitual criminal' due to her previous convictions. This was one of the judicial definitions introduced during the 19th century.

The criminal justice system in Britain has developed over centuries and the greatest changes took place during the Victorian era, with the establishment of professional police forces, the creation of large-scale prisons, and the introduction of new parliamentary Acts stipulating the nature of crimes and their sanctions.

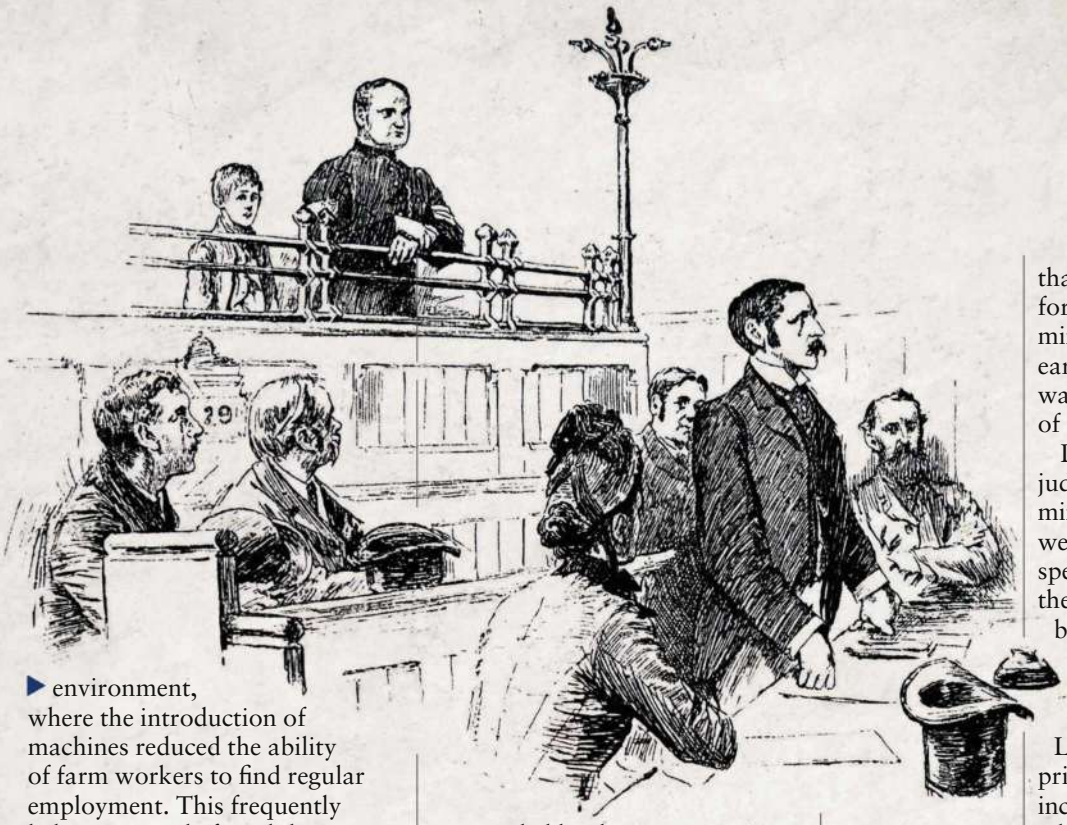
These developments had a direct impact on the lives of British citizens, especially those who struggled to survive in the growing cities. The Industrial Revolution led to thousands of migrant workers leaving the countryside for the towns and cities to seek employment in factories and mills. In Manchester, the world's first industrialised city, the number of inhabitants increased from 76,788 in 1801 to 543,872 by 1901. By 1870, one in 86 people in the city had committed a crime, which was four times the rate in London.

There were no national crime figures for Great Britain available before 1805, but since 1810 the Government has released them every year. In 1834, the annual judicial statistics were reorganised into six classifications. In England and Wales in 1870, the highest recorded crime was simple larceny (theft without aggravating circumstances), for which 24,470 individuals were tried. There were also some separate theft-related offences on the list, such as stealing horses, cattle, sheep and children. Other common crimes were assault, fraud, burglary and forgery. The incidence of more serious offences was lower, such as murder, for which 101 cases were recorded for that year. In the Victorian period, individuals could also be prosecuted for acts that have since been decriminalised, such as attempting to commit suicide, procuring an abortion and homosexuality.



A policeman tackles a ruffian in an 1887 *Punch* cartoon

In the 19th century, crime was not confined to the cities, and rural communities had their fair share of illegal acts. Countryside offences included the theft of livestock, poaching and rioting. These crimes reflected the upheaval in the agricultural ▶



A young offender in the dock in Manchester, 1891

▶ environment, where the introduction of machines reduced the ability of farm workers to find regular employment. This frequently led to unrest, theft and the destruction of property.

## Tried In Court

In the 18th and 19th centuries, those accused of breaking the law could be tried in three types of courts in England and Wales (Scotland has a different legal system): petty sessions, quarter sessions or assizes. These courts were in place until 1971, when the quarter sessions and the assizes were superseded by the crown courts. In the 18th century, the sanction for those convicted of a crime was defined by the 'Bloody Code'.

**The 'Bloody Code' imposed the death penalty for some 200 crimes**

Introduced by the 1723 Black Act, so called because it responded to raids against landowners by poachers who blackened their faces, this was a series of statutes that imposed the death penalty for some 200 crimes, including minor thefts. However, in the early 1800s capital punishment was gradually repealed for most of these offences.

During the Victorian period, judicial sanctions varied. For minor offences, most convicts were sentenced to a fine or a short spell behind bars. In the 1840s, the smaller regional gaols and bridewells began to be replaced by large penitentiaries, modelled on Pentonville Prison which opened in London in 1842. The new prisons established harsh regimes including the 'separate system', which prevented the inmates from having any contact with each other. For more serious or repeat offences, individuals could be transported to the penal colonies.

Transportation had been used as a form of punishment in Britain since the 1600s and convicts were shipped to distant locations, such as the West Indies, America, Australia and Tasmania. They were often held on the infamous prison hulks before setting out on their perilous journey overseas. The 1857 Penal Servitude Act led to transportation being replaced by penal servitude, which combined imprisonment with hard labour. The last penal ship left British shores in 1867.

## Professional Policing

In the 1820s, some communities began to implement professional police forces to protect their inhabitants and preserve the peace, such as Carlisle, Cumbria, where a police force was established in 1827 (although some Scottish forces date from the early 1800s). Prior to that, regional policing consisted of unpaid parish constables, and day and night watchmen. When home secretary Sir Robert Peel created the Metropolitan Police in 1829, it set the pattern for professional, paid policing. The 1835 Municipal Corporations Act established local government in the boroughs of England

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## Rose Stapleton c1870–1923

**Angela explains how records reveal the life of an irrepressible criminal**

According to her entry in the 1903 edition of the Habitual Criminals Register, Rose Stapleton (also known as Rose Cattermole), 33, was of no fixed abode and unemployed. She was 5 feet 4 inches tall with a "stout build". She had a fresh complexion, dark brown hair and grey eyes. In 1903 she was convicted of drunkenness at Southwark Police Court in South London, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. However, this was not her first offence, and the local newspapers revealed her background and the extent of her criminal activities.

Separated from her husband, Stapleton had various casual occupations, including laundress, flower seller and barmaid. By the early 1890s, she had already acquired some 20 convictions for drunk-and-disorderly behaviour and improper conduct, including threatening a police officer with a stone. The regular offender had mostly been sentenced to fines or short periods in prison. After her

conviction in 1903, Stapleton was committed to a "certified inebriate reformatory" for three years; the 1898 Inebriates Act had provided funding for working-class offenders to attend these institutions. Unfortunately this failed to stop her drinking and she continued to break the law for the next decade, before leaving the capital for Berkshire.

Illustrations of 19th-century criminals created by the Metropolitan Police

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and Wales, and empowered the authorities to create a police force, which was managed by the council's watch committee. County police forces were accountable to local magistrates. Two decades later the 1856 County and Borough Police Act required every town and city to form their own force. British national policing remained more or less unchanged until forces amalgamated into larger units during the 1960s and 1970s.

Although the primary objective of the new police forces was crime prevention, it was evident from the beginning that crime investigation was essential. During the earliest years of Victorian policing, individual uniformed officers were selected and promoted as detectives. One of the earliest borough detective departments was created in Manchester in 1839, and the iconic Scotland Yard officers of the Metropolitan Police were established in 1842. However, since prosecutions were carried out by detective police officers, who were managed by the local watch committee, patterns of conviction and punishment varied between jurisdictions.

## A Century Of Change

The British criminal justice system was refined and developed throughout the 19th century. The 1853 Penal Servitude Act introduced the 'ticket of leave' system, which meant that prisoners could be released on a 'conditional licence' and monitored by the police. From this time onwards, there were increased efforts to identify and manage repeat offenders.

In the 1850s, police forces and prison authorities began to photograph prisoners as they passed through their doors. In 1869, the Habitual Criminals Act established a central register for offenders with more than one conviction, which was created by the Metropolitan Police and is now held at The National Archives (MEPO 6 and PCOM 2); selected records are available on Findmypast (**search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/england-and-wales-crime-prisons-and-punishment-1770-1935**). The 1871 Prevention of Crimes Act required convicts released on licence to report regularly to their local police station, and their mugshots were added to criminal records. At the same time, many everyday activities were criminalised, such as gambling, animal sports and the unlicensed sale of alcohol. Together with the increasing professionalism of the police, these legislative changes reduced the chances of our black-sheep ancestors escaping the long arm of the law.

**ANGELA BUCKLEY** is a crime historian and author. You can find out more about her work via **drangelabuckley.com**

## Resources

**Take your research further**

### ARCHIVE

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
a **Bessant Drive, Richmond TW9 4DU**
t 020 8876 3444
w **nationalarchives.gov.uk**
TNA's records include assize trials, calendars of prisoners, and criminal registers. Many are digitised on sites such as Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**).

### BOOKS

*Criminal Ancestors*
**David T Hawkings**
*Alan Sutton Publishing, 1992*
This book can be borrowed for free from the Internet Archive at **tinyurl.com/arch-hawkings**.

*Tracing Your Criminal Ancestors*
**Stephen Wade**
*Pen & Sword, 2009*
Wade's title is a useful guide.

### WEBSITES

BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE
w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**
Both national and regional titles reported court cases in detail.

DIGITAL PANOPTICON
w **digitalpanopticon.org**
This site can help you trace convicts transported to Australia.

OLD BAILEY ONLINE
w **oldbaileyonline.org**
This newly relaunched website contains searchable transcripts of trials held at London's central criminal court (1674–1913).

POLICE HISTORY SOCIETY
w **www.policehistorysociety.com**
This charity's website includes some very helpful links.

PRISON HISTORY
w **prisonhistory.org**
This developing resource has information about imprisonment in Britain (1500–1999).

# 'I Uncovered My Italian Roots Using Facebook And DNA Testing'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Audra Carapella Crans-Henderson has used the combined magic of genetic testing and social media to break down brick walls. She explained how she did it to **Gail Dixon**

Between 1880 and 1910 an estimated four million Italians migrated to North America, hoping to find a better life. Many were escaping dire poverty in southern Italy, where disease, social chaos and natural disasters such as earthquakes added to their burden.

Some Italian migrants worked for a few years in the USA before returning home to their families. Others stayed and became part of the cultural melting pot of modern-day America.

Among them were the Carapella family. Audra Carapella Crans-Henderson tells their story.

**AUDRA CARAPELLA CRANS-HENDERSON**
lives in Olympia, Washington, USA. She works as an administrator in a US Army hospital

## My Brick Wall

I have a strong sense of my Italian roots. I always knew that I had something special when we visited my mother's relatives – the Italian language being spoken, the homemade food and wines, the huge extended family. My friends didn't have this unique gift.

I grew up in Campbell, Steuben County, New York, where some of my family still live. I've been interested in genealogy since I was given a school assignment to trace our history at the age of 11.

My mother, Mary Louise Crans (née Carapella), helped me map out her side of the family. Her father Damiano Angelo Carapella was born in 1896 in Molinara, Campania, southern Italy. He was one of many of my mom's relatives from overseas, and I found them fascinating.

Molinara is about 50 miles north-east from Naples, and is renowned for its red wine grapes. During the 19th century, most of its inhabitants would have been farmers or labourers.

Damiano immigrated to the USA in 1910, arriving via Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He stayed in the state, living in the city of Bethlehem where he became an apprentice shoemaker. In 1920, he married Mary Louise Iosue who was of Italian descent although she was born in Corning, Steuben County. Damiano and Mary had five children, including my mother.

Other members of Damiano's family emigrated from Italy, married and had children. A large network of Carapellas formed across the world, but as time passed inevitably some family members lost contact. This left Mom with unanswered questions about our genealogy.

## My Eureka Moment

A flash of inspiration came to me in 2021 while watching the Super

## Tracing Italian Migrant Ancestors

These websites can help you discover more about kin from 'Bella Italia'

### Ancestors Portal

w **antenati.cultura.gov.it/?lang=en**

View images of birth, marriage and death records via this website from the State Archives of Italy in Rome. You can search the database by area as well as a relation's name.

### Findmypast

w **bit.ly/fmp-italians-to-america**

This collection contains details of nearly one million Italian immigrants who arrived in Baltimore, Boston, New Orleans, New York and Philadelphia between 1855 and 1900.

### ItalGen

w **italiangenealogy.com**

This free website is a treasure trove of advice for anyone researching their Italian ancestry, and has a very busy forum where members answer one another's queries.

The 2016 Carapella family reunion, held near Mansfield, Pennsylvania

Bowl on TV with my husband, Bryan. During a break in the game there was an advertisement for group pages on Facebook (**facebook.com**). I asked, "I wonder if this would work for family trees and genealogy?" Bryan was supportive and said, "Give it a try." A year later I did.

When I set up the 'Carapella Family Tree Group' I had no idea if it would work – but it did, and it has exceeded all expectations. It was so exciting inviting family members to join. They passed the word on, and soon we had 50 members. It's growing globally and so far we've connected 84 Carapellas from the USA, Italy, Australia, France and Canada.

On the group page, members share old and new photographs, information, maps and stories. We also send messages and have video chats. So many questions have been answered via the group, and misinformation resolved.

## My Breakthrough

What has been a real game-changer is cross-referencing our DNA test results and relatives list from Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk/dna**) and 23andMe (**23andme.com**) via the group. This has broken down a number of brick walls.

For instance, a cousin of mine, Liz Carapella Hooper of California, contacted me 25 years ago. She found me on the internet using my middle name 'Carapella' and we tried, without success, to discover how we were related. Liz has never done any DNA testing.

Last year, I went through my DNA family list on Ancestry and found Nicholas Carapella, of California. According to my listing, he was my fifth cousin.

I reached out to the family via our Facebook group, and Liz and her first cousin told me that Nicholas was Liz's brother. It was a huge breakthrough to find out after 25 years that Liz and I are definitely fifth cousins.

Other relations have found it helpful to 'cross-reference' via the group. A couple of them jokingly call it 'the Audra Effect'.

The Carapella family loves having reunions, which my cousins from Pennsylvania have been organising yearly for some time. I couldn't attend last year, but they had a place to post photographs from the get-together on the Carapella Family Tree Group.

The reunions allow us to celebrate each other and our heritage. We love playing the Italian game 'bocce ball', similar to the British game of bowls.

Bringing the Carapellas together online has made my 85-year-old mom unbelievably happy. She has learnt so much over the past two years, and we've found answers to some of the questions she had.

Mom lives on the East Coast of the USA whereas I'm on the West Coast. Despite the distance we've always been close, but Facebook has brought us even closer.

Audra's maternal grandmother Mary Louise Iosue *(back row, far right)* with her siblings and parents

### HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?

**Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

- If you would like to contact Audra, you can message her on Facebook under the name Audra N Bryan

## Reader Tips

**Audra has some valuable advice for other family historians**

- Genealogy is always more fun when you get your family involved. Our Facebook group enabled us to do that.
- It helps to 'think outside of the box' creatively when working on a genealogy project.
- Be tenacious and keep going. Always celebrate the large and small wins in your research.

# Transcribing Welsh History

**Rosemary Collins** reveals how volunteers are powering the Crowd Cymru project

A newly tagged and labelled photo from the Cardiff Dockland Community Collection

Many historic records are more accessible than ever, thanks to transcription – the art of typing up the information on old documents to make it available via a database. One of the most successful ways of transcribing records is via crowdsourcing – getting volunteers to work on the records online.

In August 2022, Gwent Archives, Glamorgan Archives, and Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives together launched Crowd Cymru, a volunteer project to transcribe their digital collections. It's hosted on a bilingual online platform created by the National Library of Wales (NLW), and the initial tranche was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

By 30 November 2023, the project's original end date, the volunteer team had successfully transcribed two collections. One is the letters of Edward Thomas (1878–1917), an acclaimed poet who was killed during the Battle of Arras in the First World War. The other is the diaries of Priscilla Scott-Ellis (1916–1983), who volunteered as a nurse with the Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) before fulfilling the same role for the Allies during the Second World War. Both collections are held by Cardiff University.

**Volunteering can provide a renewed sense of creativity and motivation**

Jennifer Evans, digital volunteering project officer at Gwent Archives, who supervised the effort, says that reading the old handwriting was the most difficult aspect, particularly in Thomas' letters: "He was a typical creative person. His handwriting was very, very, very difficult to transcribe." In contrast, Scott-Ellis' writing was so neat that it was "almost like a printed page".

In addition, volunteers have tagged and labelled two collections of photographs: the Cardiff Dockland Community Collection from Glamorgan Archives, which consists of portraits of individuals and groups from the Tiger Bay area (1900–1920), and Gwent Archives' Newport Rugby & Athletics Club Photographic Archive.

"Those records will be transferred back into the archives' online catalogues. They've been improved so they are ultimately more searchable. They have words tagged to them, they have names tagged to them and they have descriptions."

Crowd Cymru has now secured funding from NLW's project Our Heritage, Our Stories to continue transcribing until May 2024. The next two collections to be worked on are also held in Gwent Archives: minutes books from the Llanwenarth Women's Institute (1919–1923), and 1980s newsletters from the Gwent Lesbian and Gay Group.

There are hopes that the online crowdsourcing platform will be available for other organisations to use after May 2024, and Crowd Cymru has produced a helpful handbook.

Jennifer has discussed the project at many events. In May, she joined a Dementia Awareness Day at St Fagans National Museum of History, Cardiff, using pictures from the Cardiff Dockland Community Collection to help dementia patients talk about their memories.

She adds, "A lot of our volunteers have talked about a sense of accomplishment in achieving a new challenge, sharing a common interest and working alongside like-minded people, and the feelgood factor. Volunteering can provide a renewed sense of creativity and motivation."

Working on the project has delivered other benefits as well. One of the volunteers was inspired by the Edward Thomas and Priscilla Scott-Ellis archives, as well as the lives of her own grandparents, to create zines for her MA in fine art.

**TELL YOUR STORY**

**Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*

## Get Involved

Crowd Cymru

w **gwentarchives.gov.uk/en/partnership-and-projects/crowdcymru**

You can find out more about the project at the web page above. If you can help the transcription effort, please email *jennifer.evans@gwentarchives.gov.uk*.

GLAMORGAN ARCHIVES

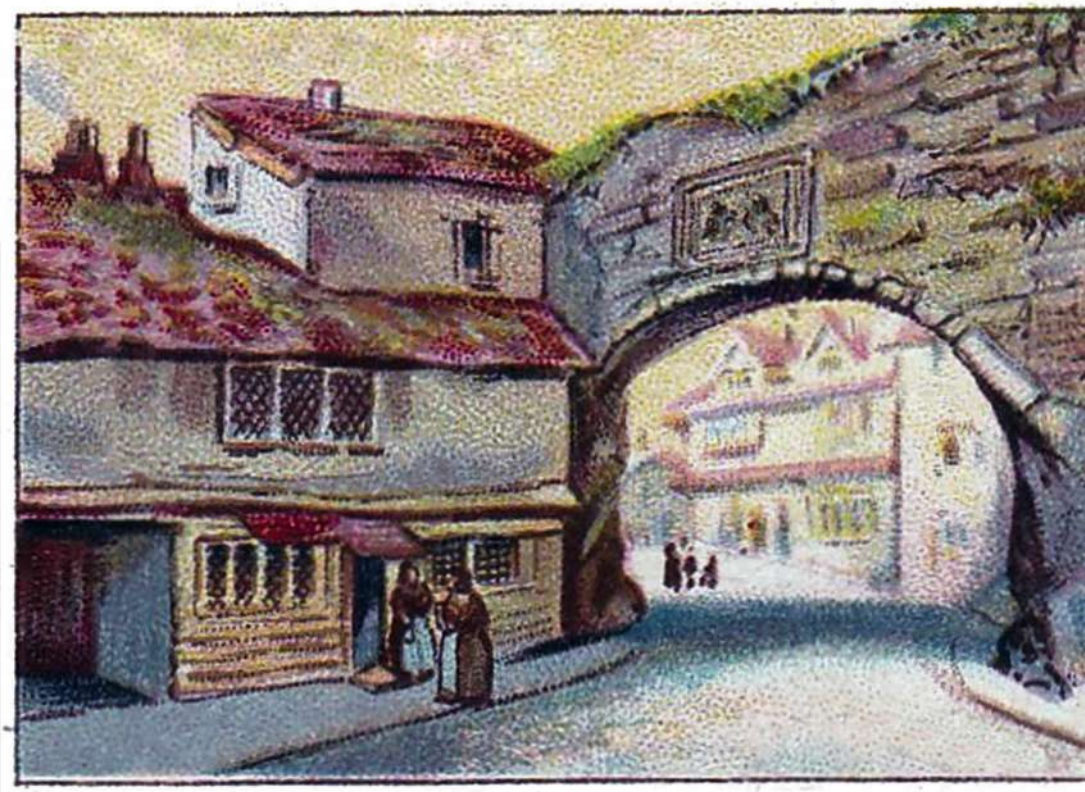
AROUND BRITAIN

# Devon

**Jonathan Scott** returns to Devon's archives in Exeter, Plymouth and Barnstaple

An aerial view of Corbyn Head in Torquay

GETTY IMAGES



A cigarette card from 1925 depicting historic Exeter

Of all my childhood holidays, it's family trips to the seaside village of Hope Cove five miles west of Salcombe that evoke the happiest memories. The idyllic harbour with its thatched guest houses, together with such picturesque south-coast towns as Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, are what earns this part of the world the nickname of the English Riviera, and tourism still powers much of the county's economy today.

Researchers are served by three archives, two administered by the South West Heritage Trust (**swheritage.org.uk**) – the Devon Heritage Centre (DHC) in Exeter (**swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/devon-heritage-centre**) and the North Devon Record Office in Barnstaple (**swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/north-devon-records-office**) – and a separate record office for Plymouth. The latter now lives in the arts and heritage venue The Box, which opened in 2020 around the time of the 400th anniversary of the voyage of the *Mayflower* (**theboxplymouth.com**). The original Devon Record Office was first set up by the doyenne of county archivists Joan Sinar in 1952, whose other claim to fame was that as a student she had lent silk petticoats to future prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

There are all sorts of ancient, strange and curious items preserved across Devon. Exeter Cathedral (**exeter-cathedral.org.uk/history-heritage/library-archives**), for example, looks after a 10th-century manuscript known as the Exeter Book, a collection of poems and riddles in Old English that was owned by Leofric, the first bishop of Exeter. The DHC has a macabre curio: an 1852 edition of *The Poetical Works of John Milton* bound in the skin of George Cudmore, who had been hanged for murder in 1830.

**For parish registers in Devon, your primary source is Findmypast**

Community outreach officer Brian Carpenter says, "An item that can reasonably be described as 'esoteric' is the probate inventory of James Huyshe, a citizen of London who was a member of the Worshipful Company of Grocers, and died in 1590. He owned land in London, Middlesex, Somerset, Essex, Devon, Dorset and Worcestershire, and his possessions were valued at more than £5,400 – about £950,000 in today's money. What is especially unusual about his inventory is that it is approximately 155 feet long, making it almost certainly the longest document we have in our possession."

For parish registers in Devon, your primary source is Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). The website has been home to the Plymouth collection since 2012, with material for the rest of the county joining a few years later. For in-person research all three

## Devon Through The Ages

**Historical highlights from the region**

**c55**
The leader of the II Augusta legion sets up a fortified camp on the hill above the River Exe. Exeter becomes the westernmost Roman fortress in Britain.

**1497**
Perkin Warbeck, a royal pretender claiming to be one of the 'Princes in the Tower', besieges Exeter.

**c1540**
Explorer and privateer Sir Francis Drake is born in Tavistock, the eldest of 12 sons. A bronze statue of him is unveiled in Plymouth in 1884.

**1562**
Plymouth-born John Hawkins conducts slave raids on West Africa, taking captured people across the Atlantic to sell in the Caribbean.

**1620**
The *Mayflower* leaves Plymouth on 16 September carrying 102 pilgrims and roughly 30 crew. The transatlantic crossing to Cape Cod takes 66 days.

**1685**
Following the crushing of the Monmouth Rebellion of dissident Protestants, the lord chief justice Judge Jeffreys holds one of the 'Bloody Assizes' at Exeter.

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archives have microfiche copies of all registers, including some more recent entries not yet available on Findmypast and indexed by Devon Family History Society (**devonfhs.org.uk**).

### Employers' Archives

All sorts of business and occupational sources survive here. The DHC has records of Tiverton lace-making firm John Heathcoat and Company; Whiteways of Whimple, an east Devon firm that made cider and soft drinks between 1893 and the late 1980s; and records of Exeter iron foundries Bodley Brothers and Garton and King. Meanwhile the archive in Plymouth looks after a collection from local household name Farley's Rusks, which was bought by Heinz in the 1990s.

Brian says, "We are constantly adding material to our online catalogue. Staff are regularly engaged in converting entries from our printed catalogues, many of which were compiled using pencil and paper and then typed up. This is making it much easier for remote users to discover what we hold, but it's an ongoing process that will not be complete for some time yet."

Since our last visit to the area, the DHC has taken in the Isca Collection – a huge archive of historic photographs, predominantly of Exeter, collected by the late Peter Thomas who published many books of historic photographs of the city. Staff also now hold records of J Wippell and Co., a firm of ecclesiastical outfitters and suppliers of church textiles and furnishings, which traded in Exeter from 1789 until 2023 (**wippell.com/About-Us/Wippell-History.aspx**).

## Free Online Records

The unmissable free resources this month include wills, tithe maps, parish registers, memorial inscriptions and directories

### Directories

w **tinyurl.com/spe-col-dev**

You can browse a Kelly's Directory of Devon (1919), alongside volumes covering Exeter, Plymouth and Tavistock, on the site Special Collections Online.

### Parish Registers

w **tinyurl.com/fs-wiki-dev**

The Devon material on FamilySearch includes parish registers dating from 1538–1912 as well as Bishops' Transcripts (1558–1887).

### Memorial Inscriptions

w **tinyurl.com/devonfhs-mis**

You can search and view transcriptions of memorial inscriptions for free on the website of Devon Family History Society. Society members can also see images of gravestones.

### Tithe Maps

w **tinyurl.com/kyp-dev**

Explore historic maps of the county, including digitised tithe maps, at Know Your Place West of England.

### Wills

w **tinyurl.com/devonfhs-wills**

Volunteers from Devon Family History Society have created this consolidated index to the county's wills, administrations and inventories.

### 1696

Work starts on Henry Winstanley's first Eddystone Lighthouse, 12 miles off Plymouth Sound. The light is lit two years later.

### 1772

Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge is born in Ottery St Mary.

### 1840

The Royal Naval arsenal is partially destroyed by a fire at Devonport Dockyard that starts on board the 74-gun HMS *Talavera*.

### 1846

South Devon Railway begins operating from Exeter St David's station, which opened in 1844.

### 1854

Work begins on the Royal Albert Bridge, which will eventually connect Plymouth with Saltash in Cornwall.

### 1941

No. 307 Squadron, made up of Polish airmen, moves into RAF Exeter, Clyst Honiton, in April. They help defend the area against the Luftwaffe until 1943.

GETTY IMAGES

Cars and a bus stuck in a traffic jam at Dartmeet on Dartmoor, c1951

They've recently completed a project to catalogue the records of the Cary family of Torquay, funded by a grant from The National Archives, supplemented by the Friends of Devon's Archives (**foda.org.uk/main/about.htm**). The South West Heritage Trust has uploaded a short film about the project to YouTube at **tinyurl.com/yt-swht-cary.**

"In addition to the cataloguing, we've held a number of popular and innovative engagement events, including research workshops in Paignton and Torquay," Brian adds. "An exhibition featuring documents from the collection will take place at the Carys' former home, Torre Abbey, during 2024."

**TOP TIP!**

Findmypast's collection 'Devon Social & Institutional Records' has transcriptions of lesser-known, name-rich sources by Devon Family History Society: **bit.ly/fmp-dev-inst**.

For 10 years the DHC has also been home to the West Country Studies Library (**swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/local-studies-library**) which first opened its doors in October 1975, based on a local-studies collection held by the old Exeter City Library.

"Over the past few years we have concentrated a lot of time and resources on improving the storage of the West Country Studies Library. This is an exceptional collection of books, newspapers, photos, paintings and other illustrations relating to Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Cornwall, together with the cities of Bath and Bristol."

The newspapers, for example, go back to 1737, with the majority available on microfilm, and are accompanied by cuttings files for most parishes in Devon, usually drawn from Exeter's *Express & Echo* and Plymouth's *Western Morning News*.

In total there are 27,000 prints, drawings and photos, which can be accessed online through the Local Studies Catalogue (**library-cat.swheritage.org.uk/home**). One highlight is topographical prints from 1660–1870, digitised as part of the 'Etched on Devon's Memory' project (**archives.swheritage.org.uk/da-ls-rg-etched**).

Brian concludes, "Work is continuing to publicise the library better, improve its storage and make it more easily accessible to researchers."

## LOCAL INDUSTRY

**GIN Did your relation help provide this essential fuel for sailors of the Royal Navy?**

One of the workers in the Plymouth Gin distillery, c1954

Plymouth Gin, also known as the Black Friars Distillery, was established in 1793, making it the oldest gin distillery in Britain still in operation. By 1850 the Royal Navy was reportedly buying more than 1,000 barrels every year, and a 'Mahogany' was a sailor's tipple of two parts gin to one part treacle. The firm was formerly known as Coates & Co., and it's under this name that you'll find details of surviving archives at The Box, including a private letter book, ledgers, cash books, journals, agreements and photographs (you may need to search the catalogue for 'Coates and Company' too).

## Devon Surnames

Are any of these in your family tree?

### BLACKLER
There are spikes of this locative name in Brixham, Ermington, Plymouth and Stoke Damerel in 1881.

### BOVEY
This is another locative name, this time related to Bovey Tracey or North Bovey – which are themselves named after the River Bovey, the largest tributary to the Teign.

### CHUGG
A variant of Chuck, Chugg was most commonly found in Exeter in the 1881 census.

### DAMERELL
This name comes from Aumale (formerly Albemarle) in Seine-Maritime, Normandy, which has become fused with the French preposition *de*.

### HANNAFORD
There are three places called Hannaford in Devon, which perhaps explains why 1,110 namesakes were living in the county in 1891.

### LUSCOMBE
The 1881 census recorded more than 1,000 Luscombes in Devon.

### TOOP/TOPE
The surnames Tope and Toop crop up across south-west England, Tope most commonly in Devon, Toop in Dorset.

### VANSTONE
This locative name originated in Fauntstone, which is thought to derive from the surname Faunt and the Middle English *toun* (farmstead or estate).

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# DIRECTORY

## ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

### Devon Heritage Centre

a **Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Exeter EX2 7NL**
t 01392 888700
e *devonarchives@swheritage.org.uk*
w **swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/devon-heritage-centre**

The main county archive looks after material relating to both Devon and the city of Exeter including church records, estates, schools and other organisations. While each of the Devon archives listed here holds its own parish material, all three have microfilm copies of all registers. The West Country Studies Library is also located here: **swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/local-studies-library**.

### Exeter Cathedral Library & Archives

a **Palace Gate, Exeter EX1 1HY**
t 01392 421423
e *visitors@exeter-cathedral.org.uk*
w **exeter-cathedral.org.uk/history-heritage/library-archives**

Here you'll find records for all of the cathedral estates.

### North Devon Record Office

a **Barnstaple Library, Tuly Street, Barnstaple EX31 1EL**
t 01271 318792
e *northdevon@swheritage.org.uk*
w **swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/north-devon-records-office**

The branch office was established in Barnstaple in 1988, looking after records relating to the area of the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple and of North Devon and Torridge District Councils.

### South West Heritage Trust

w **swheritage.org.uk**

This independent charity runs the archives and heritage services for Devon and Somerset.

### The Box

a **Tavistock Place, Plymouth PL4 8AX**
t 01752 304774
e *theboxenquiries@plymouth.gov.uk*
w **theboxplymouth.com**

The museum, art gallery and archive for the south-west part of Devon looks after material from the old Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, as well as the South West Film & Television Archive, the South West Image Bank and Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

## GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

### Devon Family History Society

w **devonfhs.org.uk**

The society has launched an excellent new website since our last visit to the region in July 2020. Highlights include a free database of memorial inscriptions currently containing more than 115,890 names. Society members can access 78,018 photos of linked gravestones too.

### Devon History Society

w **devonhistorysociety.org.uk**

Together with Devon Family History Society and the South West Heritage Trust, the society is currently researching life in the county during the 1920s.

### Friends Of Devon's Archives

w **foda.org.uk/main/about.htm**

Recent projects include the transcription of the county's First World War roll of honour: **devonhonour.org.uk**.

## MUSEUMS

### Devon Museums

w **devonmuseums.net**

There are more than 75 museums in the county – here's where you can find out about all their exhibitions and collections.

### Devonport Naval Heritage Centre

a **Vivid Approach, Off Granby Way, Devonport, Plymouth PL1 4RW**
t 01752 552326
e *researchteamdnhc@gmail.com*
w **devonportnhc.wordpress.com**

The museum shut for the winter but was due to reopen on 20 March, and records Plymouth's role in supporting the Royal Navy.

### Museum Of Barnstaple And North Devon

a **The Square, Barnstaple EX32 8LN**
t 01271 346747
e *museum@northdevon.gov.uk*
w **barnstaplemuseum.org.uk**

The collections here celebrate such important local employers as Brannam Pottery and furniture manufacturer Shapland & Petter. The museum also holds the regimental collection of the Royal Devon Yeomanry.

### South West Collections Explorer

w **swcollectionsexplorer.org.uk**

Here you can browse items from museums across the region.

### Tiverton Museum Of Mid Devon Life

a **Beck's Square, Tiverton EX16 6PJ**
t 01884 256295
e *director@tivertonmuseum.org.uk*
w **tivertonmuseum.org.uk**

Find out more about local trades and industries including lace-making, wool and brewing. The material in its research library (pre-booking required) is listed at **bit.ly/tiverton-records** .

## WEBSITE

### Findmypast

w **findmypast.co.uk**

Findmypast has school records and parish registers, as well as indexes and transcriptions from Devon Family History Society.

# Chaplain's diary, 1915–1920

**Claire Weatherall** from Hull History Centre shares a diary from a seafarers' charity

Interview By Rosemary Collins

The Missions to Seamen society was founded in 1856 to provide religious support and welfare for sailors. Now known as The Mission to Seafarers, it continues to operate as a charity today (**missiontoseafarers.org**). The records of The Mission to Seafarers, capturing two centuries of welfare efforts across the world, are held at Hull History Centre, and cataloguing was completed in 2023. Claire Weatherall, an archivist at the centre, shares an item from the collection – the diary of Rev Charles Nibbs, a chaplain in Hull during the First World War.

**The diary is a fascinating record of daily life in a coastal English town during the war**

### Can You Tell Me The Charity's Origins?

In 1856 a national society, named The Missions to Seamen, was established in London. Affiliated to the Anglican Church, the society's aim was to minister to the religious and physical welfare of seafarers. It was formed to coordinate Anglican missionary activity in ports across the UK and throughout the world. The society's activities have included ship visiting, prayer services, distribution of Christian literature, and spiritual guidance.

The society has also undertaken secular activity to support the general welfare of seafarers, including operating recreational institutes and sailors' homes, staging film screenings, holding sporting events, and delivering provisions to ships' crews and lighthouse keepers. The society has been known as The Mission to Seafarers since 2000, and continues to support and raise awareness of the challenges facing seafaring communities.

### Which Of The Society's Records Do You Hold?

The society's archive extends to well over 300 feet of records and contains minutes, annual reports, letter books, subject files, committee papers, correspondence with local secretaries and parishes, press cuttings, photos and audiovisual material. These records aid understanding of the activities of The Mission to Seafarers, as well as helping to identify the people involved in its work.

For anyone doing family history, there are two series of records that might be of particular interest. Firstly, the archive includes nearly 1,000 personnel files documenting individual chaplains and lay readers who have worked with the society. The archive also includes a series of more than 1,600 port files, which contain correspondence, photographs, chaplains' reports, pamphlets and notes relating to the society's work.

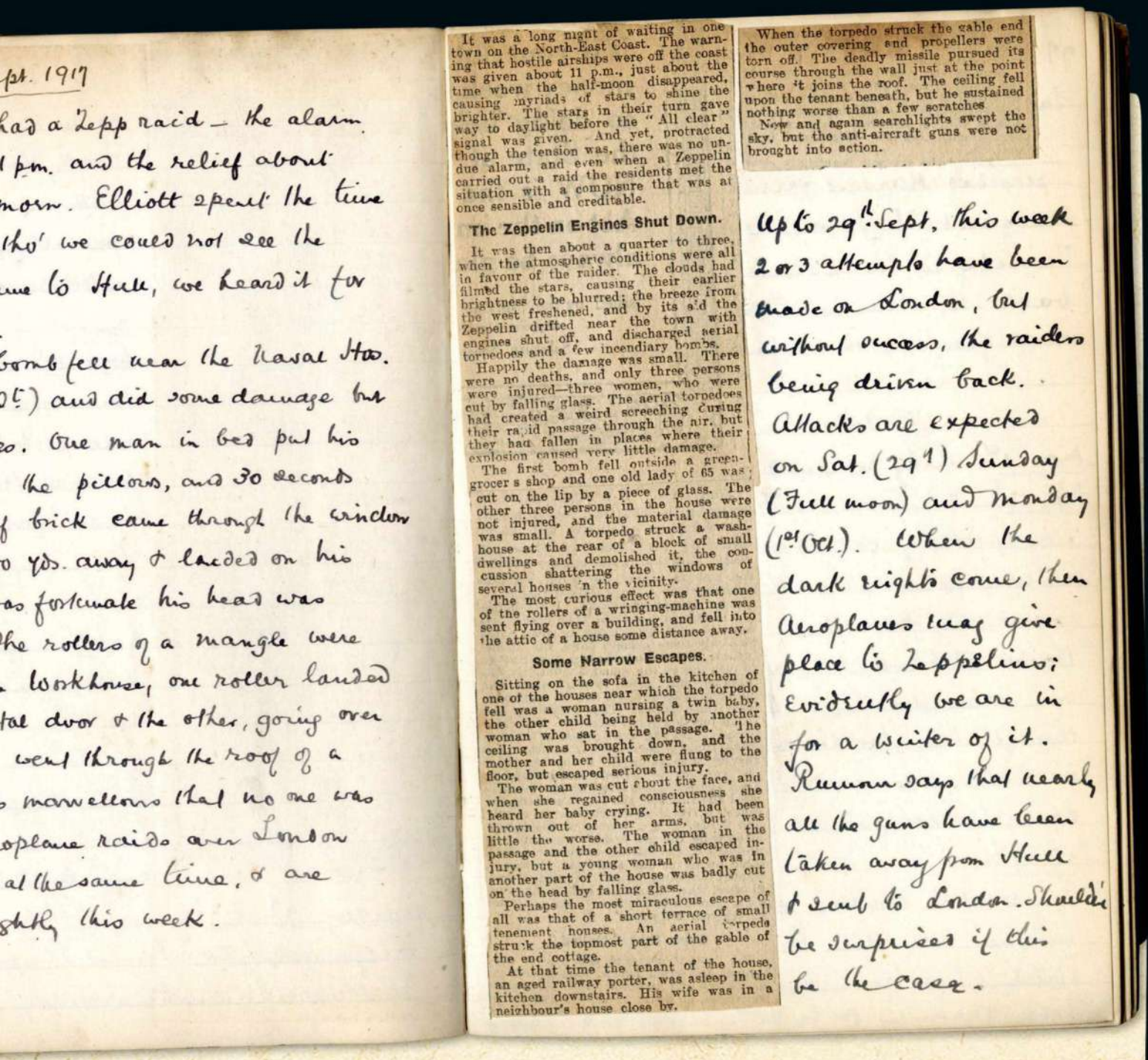
### Who Was Rev Nibbs?

The lifeblood of The Mission to Seafarers has always been the staff working in port and face-to-face with seafarers. One such member of staff was Rev Charles Alexander John Nibbs. Born into a naval family c1868, Nibbs spent his early career working as a curate in Bootle, where he came into contact with the work of the Mersey Mission to Seamen. He officially joined the society in 1901, and went on to serve in India. In 1915 he was relocated to serve as chaplain at Hull. Between 1918 and 1922 he served in the Royal Navy as acting chaplain to the Belgian coast ports. He was demobilised in June 1921, while serving with the Salvage Section at Zeebrugge, Belgium.

## Visit Us

Hull History Centre
a Worship Street, Hull HU2 8BG
t 01482 317500
w **hullhistorycentre.org.uk**

The centre is open Tuesday to Thursday, 9.30am–4.30pm. Visitors are advised to book a space and order items in advance over the phone, or by emailing *hullhistorycentre@hcandl.co.uk*.



pt. 1917
had a Zepp raid – the alarm
1 p.m. and the relief about
morn. Elliott spent the time
tho' we could not see the
me to Hull, we heard it for
bomb fell near the Naval Hos.
05) and did some damage but
es. One man in bed put his
the pillows, and 30 seconds
f brick came through the window
0 yds. away & landed on his
as fortunate his head was
the rollers of a mangle were
Workhouse, one roller landed
tal door & the other, going over
went through the roof of a
marvellous that no one was
oplane raids over London
al the same time, & are
shtly this week.

It was a long night of waiting in one town on the North-East Coast. The warning that hostile airships were off the coast was given about 11 p.m., just about the time when the half-moon disappeared, causing myriads of stars to shine the brighter. The stars in their turn gave way to daylight before the "All clear" signal was given. And yet, protracted though the tension was, there was no undue alarm, and even when a Zeppelin carried out a raid the residents met the situation with a composure that was at once sensible and creditable.

**The Zeppelin Engines Shut Down.**

It was then about a quarter to three, when the atmospheric conditions were all in favour of the raider. The clouds had filmed the stars, causing their earlier brightness to be blurred; the breeze from the west freshened, and by its aid the Zeppelin drifted near the town with engines shut off, and discharged aerial torpedoes and a few incendiary bombs.

Happily the damage was small. There were no deaths, and only three persons were injured—three women, who were cut by falling glass. The aerial torpedoes had created a weird screeching during their rapid passage through the air, but they had fallen in places where their explosion caused very little damage.

The first bomb fell outside a greengrocer's shop and one old lady of 65 was cut on the lip by a piece of glass. The other three persons in the house were not injured, and the material damage was small. A torpedo struck a washhouse at the rear of a block of small dwellings and demolished it, the concussion shattering the windows of several houses in the vicinity.

The most curious effect was that one of the rollers of a wringing-machine was sent flying over a building, and fell into the attic of a house some distance away.

**Some Narrow Escapes.**

Sitting on the sofa in the kitchen of one of the houses near which the torpedo fell was a woman nursing a twin baby, the other child being held by another woman who sat in the passage. The ceiling was brought down, and the mother and her child were flung to the floor, but escaped serious injury.

The woman was cut about the face, and when she regained consciousness she heard her baby crying. It had been thrown out of her arms, but was little the worse. The woman in the passage and the other child escaped injury, but a young woman who was in another part of the house was badly cut on the head by falling glass.

Perhaps the most miraculous escape of all was that of a short terrace of small tenement houses. An aerial torpedo struck the topmost part of the gable of the end cottage.

At that time the tenant of the house, an aged railway porter, was asleep in the kitchen downstairs. His wife was in a neighbour's house close by.

When the torpedo struck the gable end the outer covering and propellers were torn off. The deadly missile pursued its course through the wall just at the point where it joins the roof. The ceiling fell upon the tenant beneath, but he sustained nothing worse than a few scratches

Now and again searchlights swept the sky, but the anti-aircraft guns were not brought into action.

Up to 29th Sept. this week
2 or 3 attempts have been
made on London, but
without success, the raiders
being driven back.
Attacks are expected
on Sat. (29th) Sunday
(Full moon) and Monday
(1st Oct.). When the
dark nights come, then
Aeroplanes may give
place to Zeppelins;
Evidently we are in
for a winter of it.
Rumour says that nearly
all the guns have been
taken away from Hull
& sent to London. Should
be surprised if this
be the case.

Nibbs continued to serve as the society's chaplain on the Belgian coast until 1922, when he went to Hamburg to reopen a Mission to Seafarers institute. He visited seafarers at the Hamburg Harbour Hospital, reconnecting with German sailors he had met in Calcutta, and holding services in the English church. In the late 1930s Nibbs helped German members of his congregation in Hamburg, using his influence to bring people to safety in England and to help them when they arrived. In his final years, Nibbs worked at the society's headquarters in London, where he wrote an official history of the charity titled *From the Bristol Channel to the Seven Seas* (1935). He died in 1947.

## Why Did You Choose His Diary As Your Gem?

Contained within the archive are several records relating to Rev Nibbs, including a scrapbook documenting his work in Hamburg, and four diaries covering his time in Calcutta, Hull and Belgium. The diary covering the period March 1915 to December 1920 reveals his experiences during the First World War. It is a fascinating record of daily life in a coastal English town during the war, and of the work of a Mission to Seafarers chaplain.

## What Does It Tell Us?

Nibbs begins his diary by recording his arrival at Hull. His entries show that the activities of The Mission to Seafarers involved interaction with many local organisations. He notes working with cadets of the Wilson Line shipping company, sending clothing to the Hull Seamen's Union, giving a lecture at the Tiger Lane Soldiers' Club, and relying on the Humber Pilots to make his visits to lightship crews at Christmas.

Among descriptions of chaplaincy work, Nibbs includes references to life during the First World War. He describes the effects of an air raid, for instance, writing on 5 March 1915, "For about an hour the bombardment went on… Hardly a window left in Posterngate, so the Institute has 'suffered'." On 20 May 1916 he also records the imminent introduction of Daylight Saving Time to help the war effort – "At 2am all the clocks in the Kingdom are to be advanced one hour, so we are going to try the effect of this 'Daylight Saving'." His entries also record working with the Hull Mariners' Church and Sailors' Rest Society, the local Anglican mission. At this time the national society had no official Hull branch.

# REVIEWS

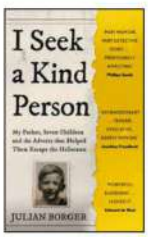
The latest books on history and genealogy, plus apps, podcasts and websites

Clockwise from top left: Leo's advert; Robert; and two more of the children, Siegfried Neumann (c1945) and Gertrude Batscha (with her parents, 1939)

# I Seek A Kind Person

## My Father, Seven Children And The Adverts That Helped Them Escape The Holocaust

**Julian Borger**
*John Murray, 304 pages, £20*




*Guardian* journalist Julian Borger has Austrian-Jewish ancestry on his paternal side. This book traces his father Robert, how he had arrived in the UK in 1938 and lived with the Bingley family in Wales. It is a family memoir of grief, courage and hope, connecting multiple generations across distant continents, set against the difficult history of the Holocaust.

Borger discovers that his grandfather Leo had placed a classified advertisement in the *Manchester Guardian*: "I seek a kind person who will educate my intelligent boy, aged 11, Viennese of good family." The advert was one of 80 similar entries placed by desperate parents trying to save the lives of their children. The research affected Borger deeply, as he investigated the lives of seven children, dealing with their various fates. Some were caught up in the maelstrom of the Holocaust and others had altogether different experiences, the words chosen in the small ads having made the difference between survival or not. In the process of his research, Borger also uncovered aspects of his own family history, unearthing astonishing journeys and the kindness of strangers.

Borger was thrilled to discover that another of the children, Lisbeth Weiss, was still alive aged 91, with intact memories of the long-vanished world she and his father were born into. Weiss taught Borger about life before the Second World War and his father's emotional landscape. Borger had held feelings of "resentment" towards his father who took his own life in 1983, when the author was aged only 22, "but also brought its antidote" in the form of deeper understanding. This book makes a poignant addition to literature about inherited trauma.

**Jeanette R Rosenberg OBE is a genealogist and family historian who specialises in Jewish genealogy and Holocaust research**

THE BORGER FAMILY

## DIGITAL PICKS

Rosemary Collins highlights three digital resources that caught our eye this month

LISTEN

### Alderney: The Holocaust On British Soil

**tinyurl.com/bbc-alderney-holocaust**

*Free*

During the Second World War, thousands of prisoners of almost 30 nationalities were kept on the Channel Island of Alderney as slave labourers by the occupying Nazis. In this Radio 4 documentary, journalist Christine Finn looks at the remains of the prison camps and the ongoing government inquiry into the deaths there.

PODCAST

### Missing Pieces – NPE Life

**Podcast services**

*Free*

For some people, a home DNA test turns their world upside down when they experience an NPE, standing for 'Non Paternity Event' or 'Not Parent Expected'. In this podcast, Don Anderson, who discovered that his father wasn't his biological father, interviews people who also made unexpected discoveries via DNA testing.

WATCH

### Learn With Lorna

**tinyurl.com/yt-lorna**

*Free*

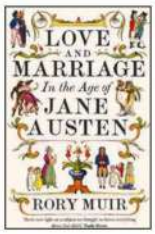
These YouTube videos from Lorna Steele-McGinn, community engagement officer at the Highland Archive Service, started during the first Covid-19 lockdown, but are still going strong. In each video, she explores the service's records and what they tell us about Highland life and history.

# Love And Marriage In The Age Of Jane Austen

GEORGIAN ROMANCE

**Rory Muir**

*Yale University Press, 432 pages, £25*




Just like the novels of Jane Austen that inspired it, historian Rory Muir's rigorously researched study of love and marriage in late Georgian Britain is about so much more than romance.

There is plenty of that to be had in its 17 chapters, which progress from meeting and courting, through weddings and children to the twilight years of coupledom. There's love at first sight, letters of longing, and tales of tender loving care through ill-health and adversity. But the social issues so close to the surface of Austen's stories are there, too: the economics of marriage, legal handicaps for women and the anguishes of war. Even the lives of those who never wed – because of their sexual orientation or otherwise – fall within its scope.

However, although the book is undeniably comprehensive, family historians seeking enlightenment on the experiences of middle-class or labouring ancestors may be disappointed. Glimpses of them – although interesting, challenging our perception of marriage settlements and negotiated separations as privileges of the elite – are only brief.

Still, the stories are compelling, and a liberal sprinkling of contemporary quotations makes this an absorbing read for anyone with an affection for the age.

**Felicity Day is the author of *The Game of Hearts: True Stories of Regency Romance* (Blink)**

## Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

# A Devilish Kind Of Courage

## Anarchists, Aliens And The Siege Of Sidney Street

**Andrew Whitehead,** *Reaktion, 304 pages, £15.99*

HISTORY OF LONDON

Andrew Whitehead takes us to the melting pot of London's East End during the early 1910s. This period of political and religious turmoil in Eastern Europe resulted in a growing cosmopolitan population in the area, which included refugees from the Baltic States and Russia who had fled persecution or antisemitic movements.

Central to the story are heavily armed Latvian anarchists who turned to crime to help fund their home revolutions. During their robberies four policemen, two robbers and a young boy were killed. Two of the suspects took refuge at 100 Sidney Street, Stepney. On 3 January 1911, the police and the robbers shot at each other for six hours before the building caught fire, killing the anarchists.

The book has several questions for the reader to consider. How did the fire start? How much did the home secretary Winston Churchill influence the outcome of the siege, or was he more interested in the publicity? Whitehead reminds us that a refugee crisis is nothing new.

Among the fascinating historic photographs reproduced in the book are pictures of the Latvian anarchists

**David Swidenbank, Porthcawl**

**David is an author and local historian who has been researching his tree for over 40 years**

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# TV & RADIO

**Jonathan Wright** previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

## Hidden Treasures Of The National Trust

**BBC Two**
**Spring**

Naomi Kulasingham works on a Fabergé egg at Polesden Lacey, Surrey, in a scene from the new series

For the staff and volunteers who contribute to making the National Trust the largest conservation charity in Europe, the task of preserving the past is never finished. So it's a good thing that their work is endlessly fascinating, as the return of *Hidden Treasures of the National Trust* proves.

Following the template of the first series, which aired last year, the emphasis is on pulling back the curtains to see what goes on behind the scenes when the visitors aren't around. Each episode, we're promised, will connect various properties and collections through a different central theme.

Among the highlights, cameras head to A la Ronde, a 16-sided house close to Exmouth in Devon. It was built at the end of the 18th century for two unmarried cousins, Jane and Mary Parminter – unconventional women who, in an era when such journeys were usually the preserve of rich men, went on a Grand Tour of Europe. A la Ronde was a setting in which to present some of the objects they brought back. The focus is on the property's Shell Gallery, its walls decorated with thousands of seashells, feathers, starfish and crystals – objects that have to be painstakingly removed, and then cleaned and reattached.

We're also taken to Kingston Lacy in Wimborne Minster, Dorset, a country property built during the reign of Charles II. Not only is the vast house historically significant in its own right, but its grounds are home to the Philae obelisk, which was a key resource used to help decipher Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics in the early 19th century. It's also an object that needs expert repairs to preserve it for the future.

Another highlight is a visit to Hughenden Manor, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, famous because of its associations with the Victorian prime minister Benjamin Disraeli, where conservators set to work on the grandest of gates.

### Pilgrimage: The Road To Wild Wales

**BBC Two**
**Late March**

*Pilgrimage*, the series that follows celebrities of different faiths, and none, on a tramp towards a spiritually significant destination, has quietly become one of the highlights of the annual TV calendar. This year's outing takes viewers along the 130-mile Pilgrim's Way in North Wales, a route created in 2011 that links ancient churches dedicated to 6th- and 7th-century saints.

The seven pilgrims' destination is Bardsey Island, known as the 'Island of 20,000 Saints', just off the western tip of the Llŷn Peninsula. As ever, though, it's the journey itself that's the real point as the likes of wildlife presenter Michaela Strachan, who puts her faith in the natural world, "areligious" actor Tom Rosenthal and comedian Eshaan Akbar, a lapsed Muslim, put one foot in front of the other.

### This Town

**BBC One**
**Late March**

At the risk of depressing any readers who once spent their nights bouncing around on a dance floor wearing a pork-pie hat or a retro-looking miniskirt, it's 45 years since ska group The Specials released their debut single *Gangsters*. First-hand memories of the 2-Tone era are becoming the preserve of those on the cusp of retirement.

Not that 60-something *Peaky Blinders* and *SAS: Rogue Heroes* creator Steven Knight is showing any signs of slowing down. Instead, his latest drama, which he describes as "a love letter" to the Coventry and Birmingham of his youth, takes us back to Britain during Margaret Thatcher's first premiership, a time of huge social tensions. The plot of the six-part series revolves around a young band coming together. Famous names in the cast include Michelle Dockery, Nicholas Pinnock and David Dawson.

### History's Secret Heroes

**BBC Radio 4 and BBC Sounds**
**Monday 1 April**

Not all of the stories from the Second World War era are as famous as they should be. Returning after an acclaimed first series last year, *History's Secret Heroes* finds narrator Helena Bonham Carter again celebrating people whose contributions have been underappreciated.

One of 10 new episodes charts the experiences of Johnny Smythe (1915–1996), who was born in Sierra Leone and joined a Royal Air Force that, when fighting broke out in 1939, was operating a colour bar. He would go on to fly bombing missions across occupied Europe. After being shot down over northern Germany on his 27th mission, he spent 18 months as a prisoner of war in Stalag Luft I.

In 1948, Smythe became the senior Colonial Office official on the captured German troop-ship the *Empire Windrush*, which had its own part to play in British history. There's also a story about a meeting with a German ambassador in Sierra Leone's capital Freetown that makes the episode unmissable.

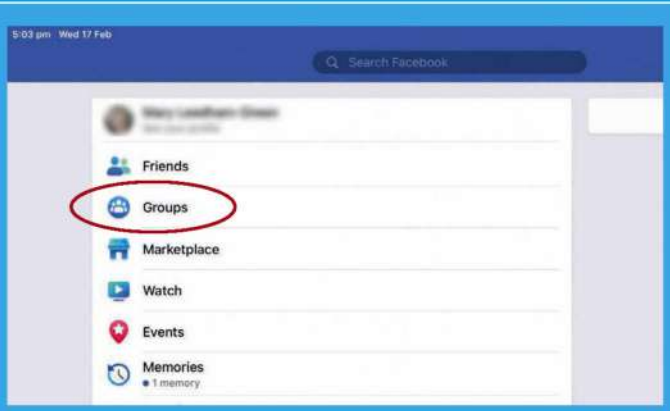
Note that a strong element of family history runs throughout the series, since it features contributions from relatives in addition to friends and expert historians. Among those remembering the life of Johnny Smythe is Eddy, his son.

THE NATIONAL TRUST/JAMES BECK

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

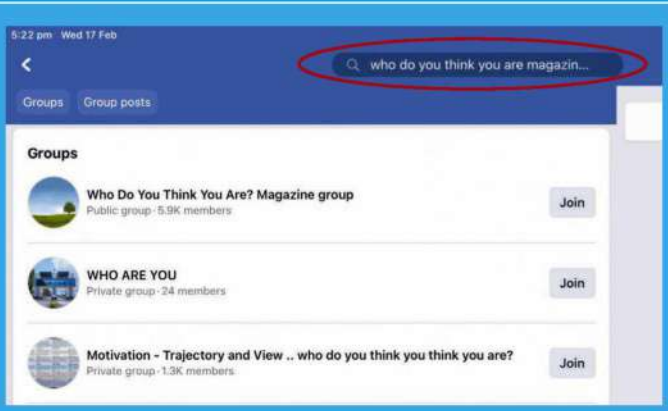
# Join Our FACEBOOK GROUP

Did you know that we have a friendly Facebook Group where family historians can share new discoveries, ask for help or just chat about genealogy? If you haven't joined a Facebook Group before, don't worry, it's very simple!



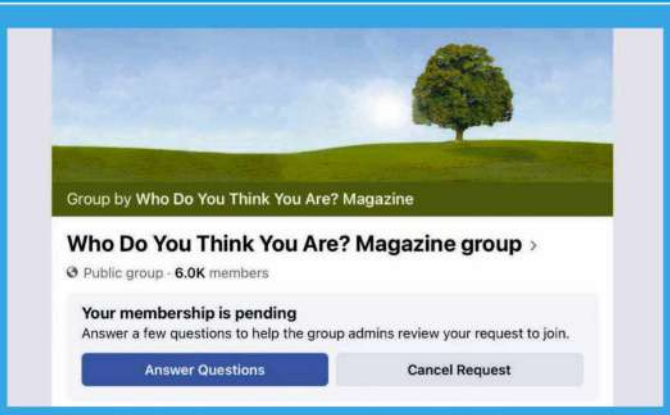

## 1 Click On The 'Groups' Icon

From the Facebook homepage, click on the 'Groups' icon (this may be at the bottom of the screen on the mobile app or from the menu, or above your News Feed).



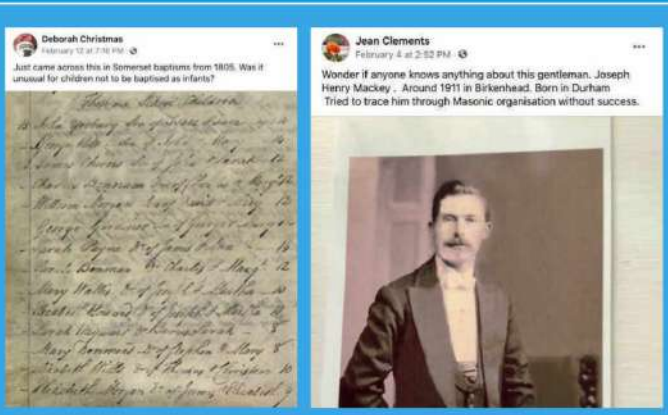

## 2 Search For Our Group

Search for the *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* Group (click the magnifying glass), then click 'Join' next to the name. You will need to read and agree to our rules.




## 3 Wait To Be Added

We are then notified, and will add you as a member as soon as possible. The group is growing rapidly, but you shouldn't have to wait too long before you're approved.




## 4 Start Posting!

You can either upload your own query or respond to other people's posts. It's a great way to share your love of family history and get help with your brick walls.

# NEXT MONTH

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# 'Violet Crossed The Mountains By Mule Train'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Martyn Guy's formidable great aunt rode across some of Asia's most dramatic and dangerous terrain in 1925 to start a new life, as **Gail Dixon** explains

Martyn's intrepid relation Violet Constance Guy

"We got to our camp at about 3am situated at the foot of the lower hills with a beautiful carpet of chamomile, poppies and other wild flowers; after a cup of Oxo we went to bed." These are the recollections of Violet Constance Guy, who journeyed across the Zagros Mountains in Persia (now Iran) in 1925. She made this journey by mule train, travelling for 24 days to begin a new life.

Martyn Guy found out about his great aunt's epic adventure 40 years ago. "My mother Joan showed me a letter that Violet had written to her Aunt Sara," Martyn explains. "It was 28 pages long, and described the journey across Persia in detail. This was absolute gold dust."

Violet was born in Limerick, County Cork, Ireland, in 1881. She was sent to school in England, and in 1918 became one of the first officers in the Women's Royal Air Force.

Violet was always very involved with the Church of England. In 1924, she was appointed secretary to the Anglican bishop in Persia, James Linton, who was based in the city of Isfahan. Violet had a background in accountancy, some experience of teaching and would also do some missionary work.

In January 1925, she travelled to India before sailing on to Persia with Bishop Linton and two other women. They joined the train of 30 mules and foot passengers at Veys, near the city of Ahvaz, and followed the droving route used by the Bakhtyārī tribe. The trek would involve scaling the Zirreh Pass, at 9,000 feet.

"Today, you'd need to travel about 320 miles to reach Isfahan from Ahvaz, by a road over the Zagros. Violet's route was much more convoluted, with steep climbs and descents.

"Her letter includes vivid descriptions. They set off at 4am in a thunderstorm, with lightning illuminating both the clouds in the sky and the earth below."

Persia's landscape was awash with colour from tiny irises, red lilies and tulips. The trail passed by native huts, where goats and sheep grazed nearby. Local people were fascinated by the western women, and came out to see their hair and touch their clothes.

The valiant mules carried the travellers and their packs through steep ravines and across fast-flowing rivers. At one point Violet saw "a huge eagle lazily circling far away above our heads".

They travelled by moonlight, to avoid the heat of the day, and watched as foot passengers danced by lanterns to the music of a mouth organ. After a long journey in the saddle, they feasted on lamb skewers, pan-fried scones, eggs and cocoa.

The trail had its dangers, and one day Violet's mule stumbled on the path and sent her tumbling over its head. Both soldiered on.

Violet signed off her letter by saying that it was "the most delightful journey I ever had". On arrival in Isfahan, a Persian reception was held for them in an exquisite garden.

"Following mission training in London, in Isfahan Violet became a 'partly honorary' missionary until, in 1926, she married Ernest Bristow, His Majesty's consul-general at Isfahan, while continuing to help the bishop with correspondence."

The couple remained in Persia until Ernest retired in 1933, when they settled in London, took up croquet and represented England at the sport. "During the Second World War, Violet worked at the Ministry of Economic Warfare, and Ernest at the War Office.

"Violet died in 1971, but I met her and Ernest once when I was playing in a junior tennis tournament. My great aunt was a formidable woman, and very focused in what she wanted to do. Few British women had travelled the route she took, so full marks to her dedication and spirit."

**My great aunt was a formidable woman, and very focused**

**MARTYN GUY** is a retired Royal Air Force squadron leader who lives in Herefordshire

## WHO'S YOUR HERO?

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